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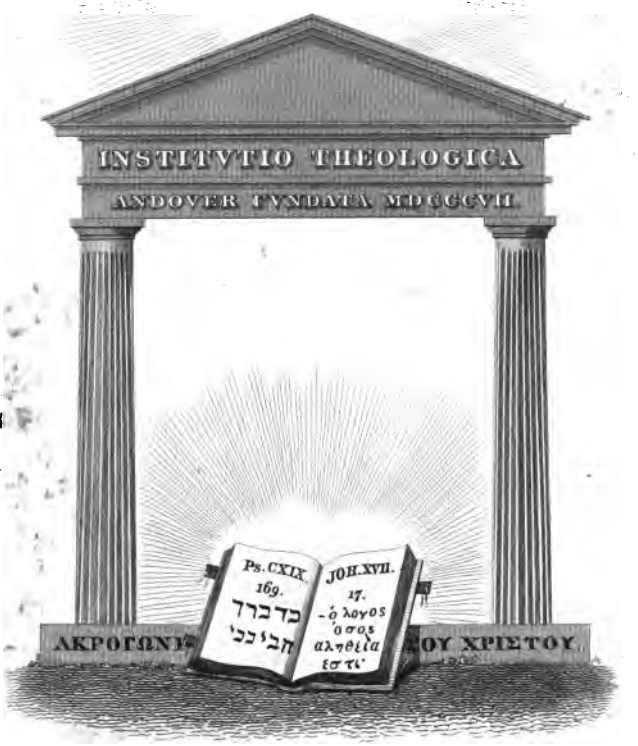

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CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

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"He taught them as One having authority."

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CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

Drawn from the Sermon on the Mount

By C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.
MASTER OF THE TEMPLE

SIXTH EDITION

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I.

Who are Happy?—First, Second, and Third Answers.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."
—Matt. v. 3, 4, 5.

HE law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Never is the contrast thus indicated more forcibly or more instructively brought out than by reading in immediate sequence the twentieth chapter of the Book of Exodus and the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. How different the scenery of the two, and how different the sound!

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There a lofty mountain, situated in the wild desert, blazing with lightning fires and fenced with excluding barriers. Around it, awe-struck and trembling, a prostrate nation, exclaiming, in accents of terror, *Let not God speak with us, lest we die.* And then a voice of words. *Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet.* Stern prohibitions of unlawful acts: severe precepts of moral duty: in themselves, indeed, as St. Paul writes, *holy, and just, and good,* but rendered terrible by accompanying threats, and nugatory by reason of human infirmity.

Here a hill-top, in the midst of cultivated lands and peopled towns; the Speaker a Man in form like other men; the hearers drinking in the calm and precious instruction that fell from Him; the first utterance the word *Blessed;* and the subjects of that benediction the lowliest of human lives and the humblest of human characters. Surely it was the fit opening of that earthly converse, of which the latest exercise of all was a hand uplifted in blessing!*

Where, precisely, this first discourse was de-

* Luke xxiv. 51. *It came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*

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livered we know not. The place is ambiguously described as *a mountain.* The original Greek says rather, *the mountain.* It may be, some well-known hill, in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee and of Capernaum, and needing no further designation for the first readers of this earliest Gospel.

Men have doubted also whether the discourse occupying these three chapters, the fifth to the seventh, of St. Matthew's Gospel, is to be regarded as an ampler account of that which is recorded in the latter half of the sixth chapter of St. Luke's. Many passages occur in both. The general scope and purport is the same. Yet, as St. Matthew says expressly that Jesus spake sitting, on the mountain, and St. Luke that He spake standing, and in the plain, it seems not very unnatural to suppose that the one (that given by St. Matthew) was a discourse delivered, as it were, to the inner circle of his disciples, apart from the crowd of outside hearers; even as the first verse says, *Seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain,* as though for greater privacy: *and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him;* the other (that preserved by St. Luke), a briefer and more popular rehearsal of the chief topics of the former, addressed, im-

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mediately afterwards, on descending from the hill-top, to the promiscuous multitude. And the formation of the hill which tradition has marked as the Mount of the Beatitudes lends itself naturally to this supposition. For modern travellers have marked, upon its eastern summit, a little circular plain exactly suited for the gathering of a smaller and more select audience; and again, on the lower ridge, between that eastern and another western horn of the same mountain, a larger space, flattened also to a plain, corresponding (it would seem) with singular exactness to the scene described by St. Luke, and to the presence of that larger concourse to which the second and briefer discourse is thus conceived to have been addressed.

These matters are all uncertain, though the reverent student of Scripture loves to ponder them. We turn now to things certain.

The Saviour *opened His mouth, and taught them, saying*. It was the solemn though simple beginning of His systematic doctrine. He is about to answer that momentous question of the ancient Psalmist, *Who shall abide in God's tabernacle? who shall dwell in God's holy hill?* He is about to describe, for all time, the spirit, the character,

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the life of him who would be a citizen of the heavenly kingdom, a sharer in the inheritance of the saints in light. God grant to each one of us that hearing ear, that opened heart, that sitting (in soul) at the feet of Jesus to hear His word, which belongs to a Christian student, to a Gospel learner, to one who has chosen that good part which shall never be taken from him!

Jesus opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,—

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

He who taught in parables taught also in paradoxes. His thoughts are not our thoughts. It is as though He had said, Happy are the unhappy, honourable the dishonoured, great the little, and rich the poor. Well, we must follow Him. We must learn His language, we must judge His judgment, if we would ever rejoice in His salvation.

The poor in spirit. St. Luke says simply, *Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.* And doubtless we are to read his words as if they declared that in God's sight, in the foreview of eternity, it is better, safer, and more hopeful, to be a poor than to be a rich man. *How hardly*

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shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! A poor man has his trials, has his dangers, even in the things of the soul: murmuring and discontent, envious comparisons and proud complainings, sometimes stronger temptations still to dishonesty and theft, are the heavy counterpoises of the poor man's spiritual advantage, teaching that, in this condition as in that, nature is against us, and grace as necessary as it is all-sufficient. The poor man is not saved because he is poor; nor the rich man condemned because he is rich. If the poor man is not also poor in spirit, his is not the kingdom of heaven. If the rich man is at the same time poor in spirit—and by God's grace he may be so—he will enter that kingdom, not as a rich man, yet in spite of his riches, and find himself there the companion and the brother of the poor to whom it belongs.

Poor in spirit. We might render it perhaps most intelligibly, *poor in soul.* It is the designation of one whose spirit feels itself poor; of one who, instead of being self-satisfied and self-complacent, or at least indolent and willingly stationary in the things of God, knows himself to be poor and needy, and even begs (such is the figure) for the

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sustenance and the supply which he has not. Yes, our Saviour says, we are happy, we are blessed, in proportion as we feel our own want, our own emptiness, our own destitution, in things spiritual, things eternal. Surely, my friends, this first *opening of His mouth* in systematic teaching was at once a Gospel. The more we are poor, the more are we rich! O blessed and life-giving announcement to the sorrowful and the self-despairing! Your sense of poverty is the very title-deed of your kingdom.

We cannot make a man think ill of himself who is all self-satisfaction and self-complacency. Is there such a man? Can it be that any one's retrospect, or any one's present, is so bright, so reassuring? How it may be with others, of course we know not: we know but one person really, any one of us. But that one person—what of him? Has he been so pure from his youth up, so blameless in life's relations, so self-denying, so devoted, so charitable, that he can indeed stand up before his God, or lay himself (the time being come) on his death-bed, and say, *God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are?* It is a marvel to us if there be such a man: a marvel, a

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prodigy, and not a pleasing one, when we read the first words of a Divine Saviour's Gospel, *Blessed are the poor in spirit!* We almost think that, if we knew all, we should find that that man has *no* trust but in himself, that he is a Christian but in name, a Christian without a Christ, and safe without a Saviour! God give us all some better hope than that!

Blessed are the poor in spirit. So, then, the more we misgive ourselves, and the more we accuse ourselves, and the less we trust in ourselves, and the less we think of our attainments, whether without Christ or with Him, the nearer we are to heaven. The simple, childlike, self-renouncing, self-abhorring spirit is commonly (in its fulness) the very last of God's gifts, of the Holy Spirit's graces in the Christian. In early life, in strong manhood, alas! too often to a late old age, there is still a lurking hope that at least we are something, or we are just going to be something, in and of ourselves: sin itself is often deplored as a humiliation rather than as an unbelief; it has disappointed us about ourselves, even more than it has been an ingratitude to Christ, or an affront and an impiety towards God. The entire willingness to

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be nothing and to receive everything; nay, not even to receive, as though when given the grace would be ours, but rather to have nothing and to be nothing still; to be only in Christ, only a creature covered up and hidden and lost in Him; that is a blessedness against which many a hopeful person has kicked inwardly almost to the last. He will ask his Father for *the portion of goods which falleth to him*, rather than stay within that Father's door, just sustained, just lodged, just fed, day by day, but, of his own and for his own, having and willing to have *nothing*.

To the poor in spirit belongs, our Lord says, the kingdom of heaven. It is theirs. Theirs already, by a right all their own. In that very poverty of the soul resides the title. In this life they possess it. For they, alone of all men, live their citizenship. They know that without their King they are beggars; without their franchise, they are outlaws; without their home above, they are houseless and shelterless and comfortless exiles. Whatever others can do, they cannot do without their kingdom. They *declare plainly*, at each step of life's journey, *that they are seeking a country*. And therefore *God is not ashamed to be called their*

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God: for He hath prepared for them a city. And as they get nearer to its golden gates, and have nothing between it and them but that narrow stream of death which a Saviour once crossed for them, it may well be that the ownership of which the text speaks becomes at last scarcely more a faith than a sight; they can catch the very sounds of the heavenly song, and discern the bright forms of those who were once faithful unto death, and now follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is, is already, *the kingdom of heaven.*

2. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* St. Luke says, *Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.* And as though to explain and enforce the promise, he adds also, *Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.* Thus here also, as in the former case, St. Luke's record bids us not too much to narrow, nor too exclusively to elevate, the sphere of the beatitude. He teaches us that, as in literal poverty so in actual mourning, there is an advantage and a safety denied to its opposite. *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of*

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feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. There is a reality in sorrow which there is not in mirth. *A sinner, in a world of care*, better expresses his condition by sadness than by merriment. To all, mourning must come: he who mourns is already laying to his heart that which one day must be laid upon his life.

Yes, it is not upon our times of sorrow that we reflect, even in this life, with most regret or self-reproach. The day on which we closed in death the eyes of a parent, or witnessed (scarcely less agonizing) the final extinction of a long-cherished hope, is not half so black in memory's catalogue as that on which we were the companions of fools in their folly or of sinners in their sins. *Blessed are ye that mourn! Woe unto you that laugh now!*

But if mourning is in itself better than its opposite, it is because mourning has a tendency, denied to laughter, to bring men to self-recollection and to repentance. And thus we then only express the full force of the benediction when we record in it the commendation of a spiritual sorrow. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* There is a mourning

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which wraps itself in self. There is a mourning which accuses God. There is a mourning which deifies the lost object, and offers to some *image of jealousy* a sacrifice of perpetual lamentation, vainer and more offensive still than that of the *women weeping for Tammuz.* Yes, it is a true saying, *The sorrow of the world worketh death.* It is only that sorrow which is *after God*, according to God's mind, regulated by His influence, directed towards Him in entire submission and conformity to His will, which works true repentance, a true change of mind, and issues in a salvation not to be repented of.

And such sorrow need not wait in any of us for a season of outward affliction. It is possible to mourn for sin—would that it were a more common experience!—even while life smiles upon us, and we have all of outward things that heart can wish. I hope that there are some such mourners amongst us, some whose secret chamber is cognizant of deep confessions and earnest wrestlings, of sorrowful self-accusations, and bitter and not (by God's grace) unavailing tears! *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* Such mourning, strange as may be the saying, is comfort. There is comfort at once in confession. When you have

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sounded the very depths of your sinfulness; when your foot has touched the very bottom of that salt and acrid sea; when you have faced the truth, and dared to see yourself as God sees you; then there is the beginning at least of a *peace which passeth understanding:* you are a true man again, disguises stripped off, and the worst met and known. I say that in that shame, in that fear, in that dread exposure, there is already the glimmering and already the germ of peace. *Light is sprung up*—light has entered—and the light which makes manifest is evermore also the light that cheers.

How much more when Christ speaks, and is heard to speak, saying, *I was made sin for thee! Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.* Art thou guilty? My blood cleanseth from all sin. Art thou self-despairing? My grace is made perfect in weakness. Art thou defiled, and sin-stained, and sin-enfeebled? My Spirit, whom I will send unto thee from the Father, is comfort, and life, and grace, and strength. Blessed indeed are *they who* thus *mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

3. *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.* The words are framed from our 37th

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Psalm. *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.* Our Saviour often drew His new law from the old; and, in so using the old, at once honoured and transfigured it.

The meek. Not a different person from the poor in spirit or from the Christian mourner: the same person in another aspect. We have seen him before his God: that deep sense of deficiency, of ignorance, of inconsistency, of infirmity; that crying aloud for the true riches, for something above change, above sense, above earth and time: that thorough heart-deep confession, that lamentation, not idle but most operative, over the experience, over the actual inworking and outcoming, of evil. And now what is he when he quits the sanctuary, when he opens the shut door within which he has prayed and confessed himself to his Father in secret, and comes forth amongst his fellows in the manifold engagements and communications of family, social, or public life? Can he who has so dealt with God be a proud man, or a pushing man, or a touchy and quarrelsome man, in his dealings with his fellows? Can he strut and parade himself as some great one; as one whom others should

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admire, or look up to, or hearken to, or make way for, and, if they do not this, must expect to be made to fear by taunt or sarcasm, by contempt or threatening? Nay, if he be this without, we must suspect his very different attitude and aspect within. If he means anything when he calls himself before God a miserable sinner; when he confesses that he is nothing and that he needs everything; when he bewails his shortcomings and backslidings, his omissions and failures, his ignorances and his neglects; he cannot, he cannot, when he mingles amongst men, forget all this, and be alike quick to resent and hasty to judge.

He cannot, we say; and yet such is the inconsistency, such the doubleness of a fallen nature, that the combination of humility before God, and self-assertion towards man, is by no means rare or exceptional. The records of Christian biography are filled with confessions of a rising anger, under slight or provocation, hard to subdue, harder to eradicate. Meekness is a grace of Christ's Spirit; the consequence of humility, the consequence of repentance.

Every day, in public and in private life, there is room for the exercise of this grace of meekness.

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It is the opposite of all that is presumptuous, and arrogant, and forward, and self-asserting. It is the expression before men of a spirit which has already breathed itself before God. O how do we suffer, and make to suffer, for lack of it! How beautiful is it, how attractive, how strong!

Yes, the text adds, by the strangest perhaps of all the combinations here presented, *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.* Just that which they do not care to do; just that which they anxiously shun and sedulously forego! But they cannot help it. Meekness is power; power with men, and power from God.

You all remember the description of the great lawgiver of Israel. *Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.* Very meek, and yet who was ever so powerful? Who else ever wrote his work upon fifteen centuries with his will, and more than fifteen beyond without it? Who ever stamped the earth like him with the impress of his mission and of his legation? It is so still. The proud man may overbear some opposition, overawe some threatening, carry some weight, for a lifetime: yet the greatest works of all, the alone enduring works

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below, have been wrought by the meek, and they have been loved even while they conquered.

In the end they only shall be remembered. Statesmen, generals, kings, are but for a lifetime: the men of self-denial, of self-forgetfulness, of determined and absolute self-victory for the sake of others, they, they alone, are for ever! They have walked in their Master's steps: they shall sit down with Him in His throne!

And this likeness to Christ can be acquired only by converse with Him and by communion. *We shall be like Him*, St. John says; *for we shall see Him as He is.* That which shall be fulfilled then, must be begun now. Study Christ here, seek Christ here, commune with Christ here, eat and drink with Christ here, that you may live with Him there. Learn to forget, in His own holy presence below, all the jars and all the variances which make earth a confusion and a bitterness. Anticipate heaven below, practise for it, learn its new song; and then rise when Christ calls you, as by a gentle and easy transition, to that rest which remains there for the people of God.

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II.

WHO ARE HAPPY?—FOURTH ANSWER.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."—Matt. v. 6.

UNGER and thirst are strong words. They express real pains, real sufferings. They denote things which, in their slightest form, make themselves felt; in their more aggravated form, undermine health; in their severest and cruellest form, at last destroy life.

It takes the point out of Scripture language to have never known that literal, earthly, bodily sensation which the Word of God uses as the type of spiritual truth. A wealthy, prosperous, luxurious life is deprived by that very fact—it is one of God's righteous compensations—of half the comfort, and half the appreciation, of the revelations of the

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Gospel. Never to have known hunger, never to have suffered from thirst, is fatal to a full understanding of the text just read.

The poor man may thus be bidden even to thank God for his poverty. He can not only desire heaven because earth is for him unlovely, but also enter by experience into some of those many sayings of our Lord Himself, which express the soul's wants by the body's distresses. For this, as for other reasons, it is still *the common people* who *hear Him gladly.*

And the rich man may be thankful for one of those casualties of his life which have given him a taste (for the moment) of poverty. A man detained by weather or accident, on sea or land, beyond his calculations, has sometimes found himself reduced, most unexpectedly, to a level of humbler experience which he has hitherto looked down upon with lordly compassion or positive indifference. And a young man, surprised by the sudden outbreak of war, has sometimes—within our own recollection—been sent, at a few days' or hours' notice, from a home redundant with luxuries, to a camp destitute alike of indulgences and necessaries. That experience was worth purchasing. It brought wealth

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face to face with poverty, and it brought indifference (in some cases) face to face with Christ.

It is a good thing for a young man to become acquainted with hardship, even in quest of pleasure. It is the one redeeming point in that life of habitual pleasure-seeking, which is the characteristic of too many English homes in the upper classes of our society, that it does at least teach men to endure hardness; that its idleness is often "strenuous;" that it makes cold and toil familiar by choice to men to whom such things come not of necessity; that even hunger and thirst are sometimes tolerated for amusement's sake, by men whom wealth has set above them, and who might otherwise be ignorant of their very meaning.

There is a hunger and thirst of the body; and there is also, our Lord teaches us, a hunger and thirst of the soul.

This hunger and thirst of the soul may be unconscious. The prophet Amos speaks of *a famine, not of bread or water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.* Such a famine is in many souls, and they know it not. Unlike bodily hunger, this is either not felt, or, if felt, not heeded. Many a man has died of this hunger, and never found it out.

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And this soul's hunger may be misunderstood. A man feels a blank within—who has not felt it? —and yet, like a king of Judah in his disease, he goes not to the Lord, but to the physicians; seeks his cure from earth, not from heaven. Thus one man hungers and thirsts after wealth, another after honour, a third after pleasure, a fourth after love. One throws himself eagerly into his business: if he can only make so much a year, set himself free from these liabilities, place himself on a footing of competence, or raise himself to the level of this man or that now just above him, he will be satisfied: for this, so reasonable an end, he thinks, so just and lawful, he exerts himself as a hungry man would exert himself for bread, or a thirsty man for water. And another has a passion for fame: or if not for fame in the sense in which we read of that passion in books, yet for respect and consideration among his fellow-men: he is ambitious to fill offices, he likes to be consulted, he is flattered by greetings in the markets, and by applications for his advice and for his opinion. Another thirsts for pleasure: he has tasted the enjoyments of society; he finds himself successful in conversation, a man of wit or humour, one who

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can give and take in those light skirmishings of social intercourse which are the day's business of a world of fashion: he is a different man when he is in congenial society; animated, roused, excited, by a charm which dull family life cannot supply. And another, conscious of the emptiness of these things, pants after affection: give me that love on which I can repose, that love for which my soul thirsts, that love without which I cannot live—and then, then only, I shall be happy. Yes, there is a hunger and a thirst there, only it is misunderstood, wrongly treated, offered a food which cannot satisfy, a drink which refreshes but to destroy.

That hunger and thirst, that restless craving, that sense of want and vacuity, was suffered, was permitted, was even aroused in you, by God Himself. He did not intend you to find satisfaction in yourself or in the creature. And that discomfort, that emptiness, which would have been a cruelty without a Gospel, is no cruelty, but the very opposite, with one. That want, felt and understood, is a finger-post pointing to Christ. All men at some time—all except the utterly besotted and grovelling—have in them this hunger and thirst, this

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painful craving of the soul: as though to say, *This is not your rest:* as though to make the Saviour's call audible and attractive, when He stands among us and says, *Come unto Me, and I will refresh you. . . . If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink!*

We have entered already upon those brief sentences of the opening Gospel which are known as the Beatitudes. We have seen in each one a sort of paradox of benediction. We have heard poverty blessed, and mourning, and meekness; each one with the promise of its exact opposite. And so it is still with this fourth word of blessing: *Blessed are the hungry and thirsty: for they shall be filled.*

But to whom is this promise made? Is it to the merely hungry? Is it to those who from whatever cause have a feeling of need? Is it to those whose hearts are set upon satisfying their want out of the broken cisterns of earth, whether in the form of riches, or honour, or pleasure, or love? Hear the words.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

What then is *righteousness?*

It has more than one sense, or more than one

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application, in Scripture. Sometimes it seems to be used for that entire forgiveness, that state of acceptance in Jesus Christ, which our theology designates as a state of *justification.* Sometimes it is used as one quality of the new man: as when St. Paul writes that *the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;* or, again, that *the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;* or, once more, recommends *the breastplate of righteousness* as one part of that Divine panoply of which other particulars are the helmet of hope, the shield of faith, and the sandals of a Christian readiness. And sometimes it is used specifically as one half of that whole of man's duty of which the other half is holiness: *That we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life;* where *holiness* represents the state of the redeemed towards God, and *righteousness* the corresponding condition in relation to man.

But when our Lord speaks here of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we do well to understand the word in its largest sense of all. Righteousness is, in brief definition, the fulfil-

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ment of relations; the completeness of human duty towards all with whom we have to do; towards God above, no less than towards man below. And thus we believe our Lord to pronounce His benediction here upon those whose whole soul is hungering and thirsting after goodness, after sanctification, after perfection: those who would fain be holy even as God is holy, perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Well may this frame of mind have a Beatitude to itself.

It is not a universal feeling.

I know that every one would like to be forgiven. There lies at the bottom of each heart, either *a certain fearful looking for of judgment*, or else an undefined apprehension that it cannot in the end be well with the wicked. And therefore to be told that we are in such sense forgiven as to be safe from punishment, would be a relief to any man. And there are those who in a truer sense are hungering and thirsting after forgiveness. There are men who know no peace till they can find hope in Christ. There are daily tears and nightly watchings, which refuse and repel repose till sin shall have

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been blotted out. These are hopeful signs: but they are not yet, any one or all of them together, the very thing itself of which Christ our Saviour here speaks.

It is true also that many, all perhaps save a few, would like to be good, if they could be so without trouble. We little know, before experience, how tight and how galling is the chain of a sin. General deadness and indifference to God may give little pain to the soul, or none: it is of its nature to be dull and torpid. But a particular sin, a sin known and felt to be sinful, yet done again and again till it has stamped its mark upon the soul, and eaten away the very heart out of the life —this is what no man can help groaning under: even while he seeks it, and says perhaps in his heart, *I will seek it yet again*, he loathes it and he trembles at it: only, *when he would do good, evil is present with him* and too strong for him. He cannot summon together the scattered and dissipated energies for one great decisive battle: and if he could, one battle would not end that campaign which demands for its decision a lifetime. We cannot call this state a hungering and thirsting after righteousness: it is nothing more than a faint

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mechanical struggling in the meshes of the net of sin.

But there are those—God grant that some of us be amongst them—who bear, in Christ's sight, this infallible mark of His saints. It is their one ruling desire to be holy. They count not themselves to have attained. Indeed, if they did, the text would no longer describe them. It does not describe many of those who pass amongst men for religious. These are, too often, satisfied persons, and self-satisfied. They *have* that reward, of which Christ speaks as future. They are filled now, and therefore they belong rather to that class of which He says elsewhere, *Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.* A continued sense of need is one mark of the blessed. The time of satisfaction is not yet. If it comes in this life, it is a bad, it is a fearful symptom. He who has made the nearest approach to Christ's likeness is the one who most feels his remaining distance from it.

How serious an aspect does this thought give to much upon which we are inclined to congratulate ourselves! What we too often desire, as the end of our religion, is a state of quiescence; a *rest from all enemies round about;* a tranquil, almost an

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idle waiting for a heaven already secured. If this peace comes not, we are half angry: we think ourselves deceived by promises which have not been fulfilled. But, if the text be true, such a state as we desired would be anything rather than Christian. The Christian state is one of perpetual aspiration: *Onward and upward* is its motto: to rest, till the great rest comes, is a symptom rather of death than of life. Blessed are they which do hunger still and thirst still after a righteousness which they see from far, but have not yet attained!

There is such a thing—is it not one of the surest gifts of the Spirit?—as a craving after holiness which becomes stronger, not weaker, as the work of grace proceeds within. I know not any symptom of spiritual life more decisive. It is a condition, not of gloom, not of doubt, not of fear or dread, but yet of deep humility, keen self-knowledge, and earnest struggling after God. It is a condition far beyond and above that in which sin is felt as a burden, or dreaded as a sign of wrath. It is shown more in positives than in negatives: not only in fighting in detail against particular temptations, but also in a longing and striving after God's likeness as it is embodied in the spirit, character, and life of

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our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. To be really and earnestly bent upon having that mind which was in Christ Jesus; upon being like Him in His mind towards God, and like Him in His mind towards men; like Him in His devotion, like Him in His self-forgetfulness, like Him in His purity, and like Him in His love; to desire this, and therefore to seek it—to desire this, and therefore to live for it—to desire this, and therefore to pray for it always and not faint—is something, however little, of that characteristic of the saints of God, which is indicated in the first words of the text, *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.*

Two things, more especially, will mark this condition.

(1) A sincere dread of that which is the opposite of righteousness. It must be a delusion, if a man thinks he is desirous of holiness, and yet is careless about sin. To shrink from sin is not the whole of the state described, but it is a part of it. It is at least that without which the other is not. If a man is trifling with temptation, if a man is careless about his conduct, if a man takes no pains to avoid and conquer his own besetting sin, certainly he is not hungering after righteousness: he is not

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struggling after that perfection, the very base and pedestal of which is freedom from the actual yoke of evil.

(2) Assiduity in the use of the means of grace. If a man takes no pains to be much and often where God is—where the presence of Christ is promised, and where the Holy Spirit of God is known to be working in His congregations—we cannot think of him as hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The most we can say of him is, that he is willing to have it if it should come to him: we cannot say that he is going after it: and, alas! without search, long and diligent and heart-deep search, righteousness comes not to any man. Prayer is its one condition; secret, family, public prayer; the prayer of one who will not be refused, who will not let the Divine Visitant go except He bless him.

Blessed, our Lord says, is this hunger of the soul. Blessed, not because it is for the present joyous; not because there is no pain in it, and no grief, and no self-reproach, and no bitter aching void: but for this reason; because it shall be satisfied. Blessed are they: *for they shall be filled.* It is a very strong word. It is used of the five

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thousand fed in the wilderness: so ample was their supply, that twelve baskets full of fragments remained over to testify of its redundance. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall in due time, our Saviour says, be thus fed to the full.

Even in this life the supply shall be as the hunger. The more a man hungers, the more shall he be filled—even now. Every single instance of this longing after holiness shall have its satisfaction. In this sense Christ says of Himself, in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, *He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.* That hunger which is shown in coming shall be satisfied, in its measure, at once.

I hope that I address some who can testify to the truth of this. They have felt in themselves an ardent longing after communion with Christ, after nearness and likeness to God Himself. They have felt as though nothing could satisfy them but a holiness which they had not. They have thrown themselves, in prayer, upon the promise; upon the assurance of God's will to give more than we can ask; upon the first principle of all Revelation, that *this is the will of God, even our sanctification.* They have pleaded with Him for more light, more

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strength, more grace. Was any such prayer ever unheeded? Have they not felt, as they still knelt before Him, that indeed it is not in Him that we are straitened, but rather in that cold, self-satisfied self within, which will not come to Him in good earnest, that it may have life? They that hunger now shall in a measure be filled now. At least they shall have enough given, to prove where all fulness dwells; enough to make them come again; enough to be a promise and a prediction of a satisfaction which shall be hereafter.

Yes, *in Thy presence is the fulness of joy. At Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* The supply in this life is proportioned to the hunger. It gives strength to the weak, and renews the life of the faint. But it still points onward. *Not having seen, we love:* but for fulness of love we must also see. Christ may be formed in us now: but in order to be entirely like Him, we must see Him as He is. And this sight is future. Not until *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption* can they who have here hungered and thirsted for it be finally filled with righteousness. To reach that home where God shall be all in all; to have completed this toilsome journey, to have finished

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this long fight, to have learned thoroughly life's difficult lesson, to have been at last made to value above all price that which earth cannot give, is a consummation worthy of any waiting and of any suffering; a consummation to which may God of His infinite mercy bring us all! Here is trial, vexation, disappointment: here is lingering if not prevailing sin; tardy progress and wearisome backsliding. Here rest is not, because Christ is not. There at last *His servants shall serve Him:* and why? *They shall see His face.*

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III.

Who are Happy?—Fifth Answer.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." —Matt. v. 7.

HE precise word here rendered *merciful* occurs but twice in the New Testament. Here it is made the subject of one of the Beatitudes or Benedictions, as a leading characteristic of the Christian mind. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is given as the great object of the entire incorporation of Christ with man, *that He might be a merciful* as well as *faithful High Priest, able to succour them that are tempted, in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted.* The merciful man has upon him (in his measure) a very attribute of Christ.

It is evident that the quality here commended is

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essentially a Christian quality; a grace of the Holy Ghost.

The corrupt tree of the world bears it not. The fallen heart of man is not its native soil. It is the gift of God.

The world of the natural man is by no means predominantly a merciful world. *The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.* A thoroughly bad man is seldom a kindly man. The kindliness of a bad man is generally both capricious and selfish. At its best it lacks the essential condition of a Christian charity. And more often, if we look for it, it is not. If a man lean on it, it will go into his hand, and pierce it. Woe to him who looks to his worldly friends for sympathy in the day of his fall, his disgrace, or his punishment!

> In prosperous days
> They swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head,
> Not to be found, though sought.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

I. Not everything which passes for kindness, not everything which is kindness, is *mercy* in the sense here intended. There is another word in Scripture, which stands for *pity*. And the two ideas differ.

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1. The objects of pity are the unhappy: the objects of mercy are the undeserving. The same persons may be both. An unhappy man is often undeserving also. His misfortunes may have been brought upon himself. He may have none but himself to thank for them. And thus distress and demerit meet in him, and are at one.

So the person who befriends him may be both pitiful and merciful. The one in reference to his circumstances, the other in reference to his character. God Himself is both these to His creatures. He is often spoken of as both *pitiful and of tender mercy.* Two words are used, and each has its meaning.

The objects of mercy are the undeserving. Mercy is defined as kindness to the undeserving. The merciful here spoken of are so seen in reference to the undeserving. Already we begin to see that not all kindness is mercy.

(1) Mercy is seen towards those who have no claim upon us. No claim, I mean, save such as all have upon all men in right of a common Father and a common Saviour. The good Samaritan in the Parable was merciful as well as pitiful; because the robbed and wounded man whom he

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succoured was wholly unconnected with him; was not only no relation, but even an alien and of a hostile race. If he had been his son or his brother, his compassion would not have been mercy.

(2) Mercy is shown, yet more strongly, towards those who have forfeited their claim upon us; those who had a claim and have lost it. Let a brother or a son have injured us; let a friend have spoken ill of us, or done us a wrong: then at length kindness towards him will be mercy too: when the Prodigal Son in the Parable went into the far country and wasted his father's goods in shameful debauchery, then was laid the foundation of that mercy which his father showed him when, seeing him afar off, *he ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

The objects of mercy are those who have either no claim upon us, or have lost it. Mercy is kindness to the undeserving. Thus much for its object.

2. And now for its nature. What is mercy? What is it compounded of?

(1) Sympathy. A fellow-feeling with the undeserving. A deep consciousness of personal

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demerit, making me at once the equal and the brother of the undeserving. O how unlike what the world calls mercy! The superior bending down to the inferior. The passer-by casting a look upon the fallen. The man of conscious worth deigning to bestow a glance of commiseration upon the unworthy. The man *clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day*, condescending to allow his scraps to be given by his servants to the beggar. Or the man moving amongst his fellows in the integrity of recognized virtue, bestowing a sigh, as contemptuous as it is patronizing, upon the man of feeble will and deficient self-control, who has fallen out of the race of life and must lie there to the end, just to point a moral. This may be what the world calls mercy; but it is not that mercy of which the Beatitude tells: for that mercy is first sympathy; the sympathy of one who feels himself to be a man of like nature, of like passions, with the vilest, kept only (if kept) by grace from running to the same excess of evil. Not for nothing does the benediction of the merciful follow upon the benediction of the hungering and thirsting after righteousness, of those who feel themselves to be empty of good, and are

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longing and struggling after a perfection seen afar off.

(2) But this sense of fellowship with the sinner is accompanied—or it would not be mercy—with a sense of the evil of sin. At each point we diverge more widely from the mercifulness of this world. There is such a thing as a tenderness towards the sinner from a sympathy with the sin. It is not very uncommon to hear a man of careless or sinful life speak indulgently of some instance of transgression. He will remind you of the frailty of nature, of the strength of temptation, perhaps even of the mercy of God. He has something in him of the former ingredient; a consciousness of his own demerit. And in speaking tenderly of a fellow-sinner he does better than that *simular man of virtue* who finds a solace for his own secret wickedness in loud condemnations of the sinful. Indulgence sits better upon the sinner than severity, yet is neither the one nor the other Christian. Tenderness towards the sinner should ever be accompanied, nay, prompted, by hatred of the sin. He who came to be our merciful High Priest, making reconciliation for the sins of His people, is yet described in the same book of Holy Scripture

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as *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,* in this sense, that He is altogether separate from their sin. So far is sin, the love of sin, or even the past experience of sin, from being a necessary element of sympathy with the sinner, that, in proportion as it has place, it even vitiates that sympathy, and brings a rottenness into the very core of love. Not in vain is the benediction upon the merciful followed in the next clause by the benediction upon the pure in heart.

(3) A consciousness of demerit; a sense of the evil of sin; and then, thirdly, as the natural consequence, a desire for the good, the highest good, of the sinful; this will complete the composition of mercy, making it like God's, and justifying the Saviour's praise. Mercy rests not in the fall. Mercy is not satisfied with bewailing the misery. Mercy expends not itself in sighs and tears; sits not down with the sorrow and the sinfulness which she both beholds and feels: she looks upward, and she looks onward; upward for help, onward to salvation; and is as ready to succour as she is prompt to sympathize. The world's pity stops with itself. If it gives a thought to distress, it is but in the luxury of a sentiment. If it ever com-

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passionates a sinner, it is as of course that it leaves him in his degradation. But the mercy which *shall obtain mercy* does not thus acquiesce in evil. Feeling what sin is, she knows also of a Saviour, and desires that the fellowship in disease may become a fellowship also in its cure.

3. We have spoken of the object of mercy—the undeserving; and of the nature of mercy, as compounded of (1) a consciousness of demerit, (2) a sense of the evil of sin, and (3) a desire for the deliverance of the sinner. Let us dwell for a moment upon the working, upon the operation, of mercy. This will be seen, first, in—

(1) Compassionate thoughts. Yes, mercy, like every grace, has its seat within. Marvel not if a separate place be given to the thoughts of the merciful. It is there, in the heart of man, that mercy, or else cruelty, has its source and spring. If you would be a merciful man, look first within. It is from within that harsh judgments, selfish contempts, and careless neglects of the fallen, come. And if these things come not out, if they never utter themselves, if they rather parade a concern and a tenderness for the wretched, yet worse still, yet more hateful, is that hypocrisy

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which makes a man at variance with his own being —false to the heart's core! So then we must begin with the heart.

You have heard some tale of transgression. One who did run well has been hindered, has been snared, has fallen. Where is your mercy? Does it prompt the instant remembrance of your own grievous shortcomings, your own many backslidings, your own (at this moment, at the best) precarious standing? Does it say to you how great an evil this sin is? how lamentable that it should have been done? how it has marred God's work, counteracted God's will, put God's kingdom further off, and added one more brand to the terrific burning? And does it awaken in you an earnest desire—breathed in prayer, at any rate—for the restoration, the recovery, the salvation of the sinner? If these are your first thoughts, if they even be your last thoughts, in reference to the case of the fallen, I count you in your Saviour's sense a merciful man: I say of you, in trustful hope, *Blessed is the merciful: for he shall obtain mercy.*

And what if the wrong in question be, as it may be, a wrong towards you? You have found out that an enemy, unavowed perhaps and unsus-

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pected, has done you some injury or some dishonour; has spread concerning you a malicious rumour, has misinterpreted into a crime what you meant all for good. What are your thoughts then? Can you judge mercifully even then? Can you feel for the man in whom the evil spirit has been thus powerful? Can you pray from the heart, not in the abstract only, but for the individual, *That it may please Thee to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts?*

The thoughts of mercy will be disciplined into charitableness before she begins to speak or to do. She will recount inwardly the revelation of God concerning sin itself; how it first entered into the world; how it spread its reign hither and thither, till a flood of evil had hidden earth itself from heaven; how it works in the child, struggles for mastery in the man, and leads captive in unsuspected bonds souls born for immortality and for God. She knows how subtle are its workings, how fatal its delusions, how strong its chains. She pities even where she must condemn, and, where she cannot trust, she can at least hope still.

(2) And thus compassionate thoughts come forth naturally into kindly words. The merciful

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man speaks mercifully. It is no pleasure to him to dwell upon iniquity. He does not feel himself raised by another's ruin. He does not run hither and thither, retailing his story of transgressions, or drawing his inferences of hypocrisy and base design. Where he can, while he can, he will be silent: if he must speak, it shall be in sorrow. He will not indeed, even for a spurious charity's sake, call evil good, or good evil. He will not so speak as if sin were less than sinful, or as if all were alike in the incapacity of resistance. He will not thus be false, even to be charitable: he will not thus dishonour God, in order that he may screen man. *Speaking the truth in love* is the motto of the merciful: if he must speak, it shall be truth; but even while he speaks he can love still.

(3) Compassionate thoughts and kindly words will run on, lastly, into practical efforts. It is an old theme of the moralists, the danger of resting in sentiment. A man who has a feeling of compassion should always act upon it. If not, the feeling itself has a natural tendency towards evanescence. He who feels to-day, and acts upon it, will feel again, and act upon it more easily. He who feels to-day, and is satisfied with feeling

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without acting, will feel less to-morrow, and still less act. If any tale of distress has awakened your sympathy; if you have felt it as a duty to minister to some case of sickness, or to expostulate with some victim of sin; lose no time in doing so: else you will have hardened your heart against such impressions in the future; they will not come to you, or they will be as if they came not. So is it with the merciful man: he feels for the undeserving, and therefore he will go and help. He has a desire, we said—it is of the essence of mercy to desire—to see the fallen rise, to help the diseased to recover, the sinner to be saved. What he can do, therefore, he does. If his effort is frustrated, it must be so; but at least the effort shall be made. Mercy demands the endeavour: if it fails, the will of God be done! *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

Blessed are the merciful.

II. We have still to trace out the connexion between the mercy and the blessing. *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

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1. There is a natural tendency in mercy to awaken mercy.

A poor person has been known among her neighbours as one who felt for distress. Wherever there has been distress in a house, its inmates have sought out her. She has been their counsellor in difficulty, their nurse in sickness, their comforter in death. Even unkindness did not alienate, misconduct did not disgust, sin did not daunt her. The merciful still had mercy. At length sorrow came upon her. An undutiful son consumed her little store: an erring daughter brought shame as well as misery upon her home. She herself—let the possibility be recognized—fell under temptation: she herself was drawn aside, and fell from her own stedfastness. Was it not then seen that God has knit together in nature the two things—the being merciful and the obtaining mercy? Who was found to be the first to cast a stone at her? Who could be found to deny to her that mercy which she had first shown to others?

2. There is a providential working together of cause and effect to the same end.

On the whole, and with many seeming exceptions, there is a visible blessing, even in this

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life, upon goodness. We dare not say, in anything, how many exceptions are sufficient to invalidate the rule. Certainly we do not believe that that limit is reached in reference to the righteousness of God's Providence, viewed even in reference to this life only. A good man is made to feel, as he passes through the world, that he is in sympathy with its Ruler. The disappointments which he meets with, the trials which beset him, the very temptations to which he is exposed, shake not his faith, his rational faith, in the favour and blessing of the Hand which leads. He finds the God of Providence to be a God who loves the right. This is a practical proof of religion which is worth many arguments, and which ever gathers strength as life advances towards its consummation.

If this be true of goodness generally, certainly it is true in particular of mercy. The blessing of the Lord is specially upon the merciful: His blessing, I still mean, in this life. How rarely has the philanthropist been wretched! How often has the merciful man found himself, almost against his will, prosperous and honourable! How many and how instructive the examples of a connexion, in Providence as in Nature, between the spirit of mercy

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and its reward! Often has the merciful man had to enter with himself into anxious questionings, lest perhaps he should unawares be the object of that terrible denunciation, *Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!* Do what he would, and say what he would; speak with all boldness, act with all independence, confess Christ with all courage; still all men would speak well of him: the merciful man could not help obtaining mercy!

3. But we have not yet touched the real point of the Beatitude: for who can doubt that it says rather this, and says it of the end rather than of the course of this world—

There is a revealed connexion between the spirit of the merciful and the gift of the divine mercy.

Yes, the words, *They shall obtain mercy*, point rather above than to this world; to revelation rather than to experience; to God rather than man.

Both ways we have it in Scripture. *He shall have judgment*, St. James says, *without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* The merciful man shall obtain the mercy of God. He is one of those who shall

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rest hereafter in God's tabernacle; one of those who shall dwell for ever upon His holy hill.

But what then is this connexion? Is it that by mercy mercy is earned? that God rewards with His mercy those who have first acquired and first manifested a mercy of their own towards men?

God forbid!

It is not of us—it is not in us—to make God our debtor. *What hast thou that thou didst not receive?* Does the spirit of the merciful spring out of the soil of the Adam heart, so that a man may bring it in his hand, like one of Cain's *fruits of the earth*, and be angry if God have not respect unto his offering? God forbid! He who rewards first gives. Such is the mystery of grace; such the marvellous interpenetrations of grace with grace.

We read the text thus:—

He who is like Christ now shall be with Christ for ever. He who has that mind in him *which was first in Christ Jesus* shall hereafter see Him as He is, and be satisfied, when he awakes, with His likeness.

Thus the connexion of the two parts of the text will resemble that of the gracious saying of our

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Lord to the woman that was a sinner, *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much.* It was not that her love earned the forgiveness, but rather it was her love that testified to the spirit of the forgiven. It is not that the merciful obtain mercy by virtue of their mercifulness, but rather that their mercifulness stamps them as inheritors of the free forgiveness.

I know not that I could press upon a Christian man or a Christian congregation a more vital doctrine than that of the merciful man and his benediction. I know not what feature of the new man is more distinctive than this. We have seen that mercy is not a mere natural kindliness of temper or disposition; not a mere vagueness and looseness in the estimate of sin; not a mere good-natured, careless, easy indifference as to the infirmities, the faults, or the sins of men. It is something different from any or all of these things. It can only exist where there is a sense of sin; where there is a dread of sin; where there is a struggle with sin. It can only exist where there is a desire of holiness; where there is already something of that pure heart which alone can see God. It is a grace of the Spirit of God; of that Spirit

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who, where He is, works, and where He works, has first been sought. Therefore we have not the spirit of the merciful, as Christ speaks that word, unless we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. *Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord.*

Let us emulate, every one, this good and perfect gift. It is the quality, above other qualities, of the Saviour of sinners. Because He is merciful, therefore came He forth. Because He is merciful, therefore spake He on earth, and ministered, and then suffered. Because He is merciful, therefore bare He our sins and carried our sorrows. Because He pitied the sinner, therefore He came: because He hated the sin, therefore He died. And because He still is in heaven that which He first was below, therefore even now, even in the high and holy place, where nothing enters that can defile, He still makes mention of sinners, still stands as between the dead and the living, still makes atonement until the great plague be stayed. The great High Priest is able to save to the uttermost, because, being merciful, He ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Take my yoke upon you, He says, *and learn of Me.*

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Look to Him till you be like Him. Behold as in a glass the unveiled vision of His glory, *till you, too, faintly shine.* He who would be like God can be like Him in one thing only. His greatness is above us, His wisdom is above us, His power is above us—His holiness condemns while it brightens, His home is still in the light unapproachable —only in this may we resemble Him—only in this can we reproduce or reflect His image,—

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

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IV.

Who are Happy?—Sixth Answer.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. —Matt. v. 8.

HO shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall rise up in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands—so the Psalmist of old answered his question —*and a pure heart.*

And here One greater than the Psalmist throws upon the ancient Scripture the light of a later and more glorious Dispensation, and says, *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

The preacher feels deeply that no words of his can add either clearness to a declaration so simple, solemnity to a warning so awful, or sweetness to a promise so touching and so comprehensive. Nevertheless he would ponder it with you in its majestic

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strength, in its mysterious wisdom, in its thrilling love, if so be we may not only lay it to heart, but also grow into it and live by it.

1. Now I know that there may be found in these words a sense such as this: *Blessed are they who have a clear conscience, a single eye, a perfect devotion: blessed are they whose allegiance to God is undivided, and who have never been guilty of that spiritual unfaithfulness to their one Lord, which the Scripture often designates by the figure of whoredom or adultery.* But, standing where this Beatitude stands, among the enumeration of special graces, such as meekness, and mercifulness, and peacemaking, and desire after righteousness, I think it more natural, as well as more profitable, to understand it rather as a benediction upon one particular quality of the renewed soul, that which we commonly understand by the word purity. No one who knows the world, and *the corruption that is in the world through lust*—and no one surely who knows himself, and the fearful proneness that is in him to the sin of uncleanness—will think that, in so interpreting the text, we too much narrow it, or that we turn its keen edge upon an evil of small compass or of partial application.

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When man fell, he fell through lust. It was to the body first of all that Satan addressed himself; and though the particular appetite first assailed was the appetite of taste, yet this was but a sample of the lustings then stimulated, and the instant consequence was that sense of shame which indicated but too surely a deeper and more calamitous corruption. Just as our Lord, who is called the second Adam, conquered all bodily temptations when He conquered that which came to Him through hunger; even so the first Adam yielded to all bodily temptations in one, when he yielded to that which came to him through the palate. *The lust of the flesh*, though it takes many forms, is all one in kind: a man who is the slave of one appetite is the slave of that body which is the seat of all appetite: and the historic parable is still in every age verified, that he who has eaten of the forbidden fruit perceives, instantly afterwards, that he is naked.

Oh, when that first drop of sin entered God's fair and beautiful world, how soon did it become a deluge! There was no safety but in absolute uprightness: nay, even that, while it was the uprightness of mere innocence, was itself no safeguard. It seems as

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though Omnipotence itself could not create a being like itself, a being incapable of choosing evil and refusing good. It seems as though every created being must have its choice between sin and right, and must exercise that choice freely. It was so with the Angels: even of them, some, when the alternative was presented, *kept not their first estate, left their own habitation*, and became in turn the instruments of presenting the same alternative to a later and lower order of being. And that later and lower order had its choice also: exercised that choice freely, and, alas! exercised it for evil. O the wonderful depth of that one, that only secret, the origin of evil! We must leave it, we must endure it, we must wait for its unveiling till a day still future. Let us be thankful that, if there is that which we cannot know, there is at least also that which we can do. There is a way of escape, there is a door opened; and when God opens, none can shut.

Meanwhile contemplate with steady, unflinching gaze the spectacle of that world into which evil has entered. Behold the corruption, the wide-spread, the universal corruption that is in the world through lust. See its operation in sins that fill our gaols, crimes that make havoc of the peace of

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families. See it in the rich and in the poor, in the young and in the old, in the educated and in the ignorant, in the civilized man as in the savage. But see it, first and most of all, where it most behoves you to look for it, in your own secret bosom. Recollect, if you can, the time, from earliest youth, when sin wrought not within you; when you were unconscious of evil lustings, or when you were absolutely safe from indulging them. Remember how when our Saviour, with the woman taken in adultery before Him, said to the surrounding accusers, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*, they went out, every one of them, convicted by their own conscience, from the eldest to the youngest, and left alone together the guilty one and the Sinless. Look back, old men, upon threescore years and ten, almost upon fourscore years already, of mortal life, and say at what stage of that long existence you were innocent of evil. And look back, boys and young men, upon your little experience of earthly being, and say when, since you began to feel, you were ignorant of sinful imaginations, and at least of sinful thoughts. Be prepared, by what you have known, for what is before you.

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Never will you be, for long together, unassailed by such temptations. Expect not, for you will not find, at any point (however distant) of your pilgrimage below, an exemption from the common lot of the fallen. Happy they, who, conscious of their fall and of their peril, so cry out betimes, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* that they can at last answer, with St. Paul, the question of their own self-despair, and say, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

For does not, indeed, the text itself suggest to us that there is hope there? Would He who came down from heaven for us to suffer and die, mock us with a benediction which was altogether unreal? When our Saviour says, *Blessed are the pure in heart*, He says also, in effect, *And such may ye be.* He says also, in effect, *Come unto Me, and I will make you so: if any man thirst for this grace, let him come unto Me, and drink.* Not therefore as men who see far above or far beyond them a blessedness for ever forfeited or utterly unapproachable, but rather as those who hear, on credible testimony, of a sweet Oasis in life's desert, of a fresh welling spring in a waste howling wilder-

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ness, which is there on purpose for them, to which they can make their way, and from which there need be for them no more departing; even so let us take into our deepest souls these words of Christ; let us read them as a promise yet more than as a warning; and let each soul that He has made cry out to Him who thus speaketh, for a share in that benediction, for a satisfaction out of that fulness!

Blessed are the pure in heart. He saith not, Blessed are they who are born so: for there are none such. He saith not, Blessed are they who have no human frailties, none of the passions and appetites of the fallen Adam. If there be any such, even in a poor qualified way, they are not those whom the Saviour here blesses. Every line of the Gospel tells us that the pure in heart here spoken of are they who have reached purity through grace: they (in part at least) of whom St. Paul speaks, when, in writing to the Corinthians, he says, after enumerating some of the worst forms of human sin, *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

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I say not, indeed—God forbid—that in Gospel days, and among children of grace and of the kingdom, there are none who even from early years have kept themselves pure. I say not—God forbid—that all must first taste of sin, and then afterwards cleanse themselves through conversion and the Spirit. We ought to have been nurtured, every one of us, from the very first, in purity and self-control. But that very nurture could only be *in the Lord*—only through grace—only through the mercy and power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even that purity is not the purity of nature: it is the work of God. Even a person thus kept has rather become pure than been pure. He has had the same fallen nature: only he has been enabled to prevent and preoccupy himself with Divine grace, before he sank into the indulgence of those appetites which yet he had and was conscious of within. *Blessed*, above others, *are* these *pure in heart*. They have indeed been twice blessed: they have never tasted of the forbidden fruit; they have not had that dreadful, that terrific awakening, to find themselves naked!

For some who read this Benediction it is not

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too late, perhaps, to secure this double blessing. There are those who have not yet actually sullied a baptismal purity. There are those whom a holy home has sheltered from the approach of the tempter: there are those whom a father's hand and a mother's eye have guarded sedulously from the sight and touch of evil. There are those—for, after all, it is *from within, out of the heart of man,* that the worst of evil thoughts come, and nothing that man can do can really deliver son or daughter from the devices and desires of an inbred corruption—there are those, I say, who have not trusted in an outward protection, but have early sought for themselves *the shield of faith* and *the sword of the Spirit.* Let me propose to all these the holy, the divine ambition, of a spotless purity! Let them, in the very furnace of a hot temptation —into which, at some time or other, almost all men must be thrown—be seen there with One beside them whose form is that of the Son of God! So when life ends, and the dazzling sunbeam of eternity is *trying every man's* earthly *work, of what sort it was,* theirs shall be the blessedness described (scarce in figure) in the Revelation of St. John, *I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the*

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Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne: and no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Too late, too late! I hear many exclaiming: too late, for me, is the mention of that first, that double blessedness, the property of those who have always, through Divine grace, kept themselves pure. I have drunk, more or less deeply, of the poisoned cup; tasted, more or less greedily, for myself of the forbidden fruit. Ah! it is the commoner as well as the unhappier experience. And we who thus feel must not be too tenderly, too

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effeminately, dealt with. We want strictness, we want severity, we want even sternness. He who is in earnest will confess that he is quite tender enough, quite effeminate enough, with himself. He values the Gospel for its great plainness of speech. He values the Gospel for saying explicitly, *They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* He knows that he cannot spare one of those severe sayings. He feels that he wants the very threat of hell, of an everlasting punishment, of an undying worm and an unquenched fire, to make him tremble as he ought in the face of sin. He does not feel that, for him at least, it would be safe to admit any mitigation of the threatened prospect. Dreadful as it is, it sounds like truth; and he can bow before it even while it slays him. *The law is not made for a righteous man;* but I, who am a sinful man, need every word of it.

This is the first step, in many cases, towards the recovery of purity. *Hear*, first, *and fear.* Take fully into view this fact. If you will live, if you will risk dying, in sin, you cannot see God—you must go where God is not—that place of torment will be (awful words!) *your own place. Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own*

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place. Let us say to ourselves, If I will *do this great wickedness, and sin against God,* I must take the consequence too: *the wages of sin is death.* Let me pause, let me consider, let me struggle—even that is better than yielding without a struggle—better still, let me pray! Yes, when the temptation comes, whether to thought or act of impurity, let me drag myself to my knees—let me say the word—let me call God in—let the tempter find me thus, find me with God, find me with the Holy One—and, if he must have me, let him come after me there—there, where is the Almighty—there, where He is whose name is Holy!

And let me take heed of the first approaches of evil. I know perfectly well where and when—in what company, at what hours, by what inlets, and amidst what circumstances—I am most easily beset of evil: then let me be watchful and circumspect: that which it is too late to resist when it is upon me—certainly when I myself have sought it—it is not too late to shun beforehand; not too late to guard against and to prevent; oftentimes not too late to escape by flight! Here, and in this one case, to fly is to fight. Sins of impurity

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are most bravely met by the coward: they are best triumphed over when most timidly fled from. The Deity that fights for you shall rescue you by the cloud that withdraws from combat.

And shall we not say, Learn, ye who would become pure, St. Paul's singular lesson, of fighting it out with the body? *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.* Let the power of one lust show you that you must coerce and vanquish all; that you must be supreme at home; that you must leave your own body in no doubt which is master, you or it. Temperance in food and drink; activity of mind and life; vigorous, hard, often wearisome occupation; a day meted out by hours, and a night demanded by weariness; these are among the secrets of that pursuit of purity of which we are speaking, a pursuit of purity not by the innocent, but by the defiled.

Most and above all, live much with God. Live with Him till you and He are at one. Live with Him till what He wills you will, and what He hates you hate. Often at first you will feel His presence tedious, sometimes (God forgive it) even repulsive; but tarry on, with your heart or without it, as you can, till He shall help you to do it

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better; with more willingness and more devotion. *Wait on the Lord. . . . Wait, I say, on the Lord. Tarry the Lord's leisure;* at last He will lift up His light upon you and give you peace.

2. Thus, then, we reach the promise attached to the benediction—

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

As though He would say, I have bidden thee to do a hard thing, but it is worth thy while. As though He would say, I know it is difficult to be pure in heart; difficult to become pure, difficult to remain pure: yet follow after—faint oftentimes, yet pursuing—because the end of that pursuit will repay any toil; because the end of it all is, *thou shalt see God.*

They shall see God.

How? and when?

We must clear our minds altogether from the idea of any sensible, any corporeal vision. In that manner *no man hath seen God at any time.* He *dwelleth* still and for ever *in the light which no man can approach unto.* The sight spoken of must be for ever a spiritual sight. But even as bodily sight consists chiefly in this, that it is the

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discernment of the characteristics and properties of an object; and even as bodily sight depends for its possibility upon this, that there is nothing interposed between the eye and the object; so is it with the promised sight of God. The pure in heart shall discern, with a clearness and a truthfulness denied to the impure, the real characteristics and properties of God: and the pure in heart shall have, as the condition of this discernment, a nearness and directness of access to God Himself with which no interposed obstacle shall interfere, and by virtue of which they shall communicate with Him, unto knowledge, unto love, unto satisfaction and fulness of joy, even for ever and ever.

If we cannot all say, from a blessed experience, that the pure in heart see God, at least we can all say, with too much cause, the converse of this, that the impure in heart cannot see Him. What is there which so instantly clouds that Divine vision as a sin, ever so small a sin, of impurity? The first cloud rising out of the sea of a fallen nature, if it be no larger at first than a man's hand, is enough to shade and to hide from us the sun of God's countenance. Oftentimes we can best judge of the approach of an undeveloped, an almost unsus-

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pected temptation, by observing, with a keen introspection, its effect upon our inmost dealing with God. As soon as we perceive that we kneel before God without comfort and without benefit—that confession lacks candour, and supplication earnestness, and thanksgiving fervour—then we may be warned that something is wrong, that there is an idol in *the chambers of imagery* which cannot coexist with the glory upon the mercy-seat. Then will the wise man enter into judgment with himself, that he be not judged of the Lord. Then will he review afresh each particular of life, secret and outward, with a resolute purpose to know the worst, and to have no compromise with evil. Often will it be found that some root of bitterness, undetected before, has been springing up to trouble him; that some cloud of inordinate affection has spread itself over that eye of the soul which ought to be looking out straight and steadily towards the place where God's honour dwelleth. Happy he who, thus forewarned, is also forearmed! accepts the Lord's token, and invokes, afresh and with thankfulness, the Lord's cleansing!

The pure in heart shall see God.

When? At once. That vision waits not all

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for heaven. In proportion as a man becomes pure in heart, in the same proportion shall he see God. The purifying of the heart is effected by the sight of God. *Purifying their hearts*, it is written, *by faith.* And faith is spiritual sight. Faith is the seeing Him who is invisible. We have all known—God grant it—what it is to have a friend, a human friend I mean, before whom we could not bear to appear, nay, before whom we could not endure to be, unchaste or defiled: his very presence condemned, his very presence almost forbade, impurity. Even thus is it tenfold and ten thousandfold with God Himself. To set Him before us, to be conscious of His presence, to walk as in His sight—this is the real cure, the only real cure, of the heart's uncleanness: he who so lives shall indeed become like Christ, because he (in a measure) sees Him already as He is. And that which is in one sense the means, is in another sense the end. That sight which is the healing of impurity is also the reward of purity. Soon shall the remaining veil between man and his God be drawn aside, and the pure in heart shall see Him. They shall be with Him for ever. He shall dwell among them. *His servants shall see Him. They*

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shall see His face. His name shall be in their foreheads. Yet a little while—yet a few days of prayer and wrestling—yet a few tears and sighs, a few struggles and disappointments, a few hard-won fights, and a few bitter and most unwilling defeats—and then peace, peace for ever—the rest of Paradise, and the sight of God! In that day, when the illusions of time are dispelled, when the world has been rolled up as a scroll, and the flesh is seen as a mere mass of corruption, and the sowing of the wind is followed for ever by the reaping of the whirlwind, who will be the wise man, and who the foolish? who the blessed, and who the lost? O the joy which will pour itself upon the soul which once endured the pain and the toil of washing itself white in the blood of the Lamb! O the thrill of satisfied hope which shall attend the fulfilment, in that day, of the sure word of promise—

Blessed are the pure in heart:
For they shall see God!

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V.

Who are Happy?—Seventh Answer.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."—Matt. v. 9.

EACE. The very sound is melody. To be at peace—peace within, peace at home, peace with all men—there is sweetness, there is harmony in the very words. To depart in peace, when the last end comes; to die in peace, to enter into peace; that is our one desire for ourselves, that is our one idea of comfort in parting for the last time with those we love.

And yet how little is there of peace below! Take the simplest, what should be the easiest, of all kinds of peace; peace within doors, peace in families, peace among those whom God has knit together by the bond of sonship and brother-

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hood, of a common parentage and a common home. How seldom do we find a house entirely at peace with itself! How do jarring tempers and opposite inclinations break the daily concord of home, mar the enjoyment of family converse, and destroy the whole pleasure of its gatherings round a common table! We notice it as a thing in some degree remarkable, if the thought is forced upon us by a sojourn in a friend's house, That is indeed a loving family, a united home!

If domestic peace, in this fullest exercise, is rare, how much rarer peace among neighbours; peace, perfect peace, among those who have no special bond of union but that of local nearness, casual acquaintance, or association in business! It is true, there is one help towards this kind of peace, which is wanting to the other. The rules of courtesy and good manners are felt to bind strangers, when they do not always bind families. There is a restraint upon our intercourse with neighbours, which is not recognized at home. There are things which cannot be said in public or in society, which can be said in private and amongst kinsmen. It is well that it is so in the one case; we could wish sometimes that

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it were so also in the other. It is a mistake to allow the rules of good breeding to be broken even at home. If love, the highest of all laws, is not strong enough to prevent rudeness or to preclude unkindness, then there is need of that secondary, that inferior restraint, which is furnished by civility and mutual respect. But how far removed is this from anything worthy of the name of peace! The dissensions of neighbours, the backbitings and slanderings and quarrels of neighbours, are proverbial among the poor: and if in a higher rank these open ebullitions of dislike are checked by rules of social propriety, we all know how powerless these are to secure harmony; to prevent the cherishing of bitter grudges, or the dissemination of calumnies only more injurious because less open. *Peace* is not the word which we can apply with any fitness to yard or street, to village or town, to congregation or church, in this fallen, this disjointed world.

Three things, which might all be summed up in one, preclude it.

(1) One of these is selfishness. While we all look only at our own things, and none of us also at the things of others, there cannot be peace. If we

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must all be rival candidates for every honour, and for every gain, and for every pleasure; if there is to be no such thing as giving way and making room, living and letting live, in reference to the little comforts of a home or the larger interests of business and the world; if each one is to count another's gain his loss, and even to carry this so far as to count another's character, or another's reputation, as so much deducted and subtracted from his own, there cannot be peace; there must be disunion, discord, conflict. Selfishness is a fatal bar to peace.

(2) But there lies a vice yet more deeply rooted in fallen man: and that is pride. When St. Paul would guard the Philippians against selfishness, he guards them first and last against pride. *Let each esteem other better than themselves*, and then you will not *look every man on his own things*, but be able, like Christ Jesus, to look *every man also on the things of others*. It is so still. It is pride which makes us selfish. We all think that we have a sort of right to superiority. It is only by long and tedious processes that pride is driven out, or trampled out, or burnt out of any man. That is the [illegible]as to be done in us if we would ever see

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God. Pride cannot exist in heaven. As soon as pride entered heaven, Angels fell; and as soon as fallen Angels brought pride into Paradise, man fell. Pride entered into the world, and selfishness passed with it upon all men. Yes, and pride still acts, directly as well as through selfishness, in destroying peace. For one quarrel which arises out of a mere collision of interests, fifty and a hundred bitter feuds arise out of wounded pride. A man has slighted me; a man has taunted me; a man has spoken disparagingly of me, or I suspect that he has, to another: I can read it, I say, in that other's altered manner, indifferent look, or evident shyness: that is enough: I owe the man a grudge, and I shall pay it. Or else, such is the sophistry of human nature, I profess to forgive, I fancy I forgive: but yet, in some way or other, a dislike, an aversion, remains: whatever else there is, there is not peace: for peace is union, peace is harmony, peace is love.

(3) But I said that even pride, as well as selfishness, might be traced up to a third thing: and that is, a want of peace within, of peace with God. The real cause of all discord between men is variance with God. The man, each of the two

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men, has a quarrel with his God: how can they agree with each other? Ah, we little know the extent of that mischief which we faintly describe as enmity with God. A man has not found peace: how can he show it? A man is restless, dissatisfied, not at one but at two, in his own soul: there is war there—terrible, wasting, interminable war there: the passions are on one side, the appetites are on one side, the affections are on one side; on the other there is the cold reason, the misgiving mind, the condemning conscience; and the will vacillates and oscillates between the two forces; and the conduct habitually obeys the one, disobeys the other, and yet knows all the time that, in so doing, it is displeasing, defying, fighting against God! How can a man in that state, torn by intestine faction, be at peace with his fellow-man? He is not at peace with himself: how much less with his brother! Selfishness is a result, pride itself is a result, of a deeper and more fundamental discord still.

Into such a world as this—a world ignorant of peace, a world split into as many contending parties as there are human beings in a generation—our all-wise, all-merciful Lord comes with a

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message from heaven, and says, *Blessed are the peacemakers.* Peace wants making, for it is not there: blessed are they who make it. Let us ask of whom He speaks; how a peacemaker is himself made: then how he exercises his divine art of making peace with others, between others, for others: and let us pray, as we hear, that we ourselves may have a part in the glorious benediction, *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

1. The first part of the inquiry is already anticipated. The peacemaker is himself made by being personally reconciled to God. He too, like other men, had a fallen, and therefore a disunited and disjointed nature: he too had appetites crying, *Give, give;* passions clamouring for indulgence, and an inclination propense to evil, backward to good. He too found that, when he would do this, something within drew him towards that, and the thing to which he was drawn was contrary to the one perfect will of God. In this perplexity, in this mutiny and warfare of his being, he accepted the Gospel Revelation of a free forgiveness through the alone merits and death of the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus Christ our Lord. Coming to God

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Himself through Him, he found comfort and he found peace. He regarded the Gospel as a proclamation of peace; as a direct revelation of an entire pardon for all and for each who will believe and embrace it. Having before found God's service a mere bondage, he now finds it a perfect freedom: and for this reason; because before he was trying to pacify an enemy, and now he is trying to please a Friend. He is gradually learning the great lesson, that the happiness of man consists in being entirely submissive, entirely devoted, and entirely consecrated to God. Anything which comes to him with the offer of a pleasure, great or small, to be enjoyed against or even without God, he knows at once to be a snare, a delusion, and a lie. He has had enough of such offers. *The time past of his life suffices him*, he says, to have lived in such experiments and in such disappointments. And whereas till now, Prayer and the Bible, Church and the Sacrament, were irksome and distasteful duties —escaped from on any excuse, or gone through with as necessary evils—he now regards each as a help sent him towards greater happiness, an opportunity of holding converse and communion

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with One in whose favour is life, and whom not having seen he loves.

2. This is the brief spiritual history of the peacemaker himself. This is the way in which he was qualified for that work. He found peace first, and therefore now he makes it. He has lost that sense of discord within, which prompts to discord without. He has laid aside that proud estimate of himself, which is entirely inconsistent with the condition of a sinner saved by grace. When pride rises again—and he often feels it working—he bethinks himself what he is, and where; he remembers how Christ found him, and by what entire self-forgetfulness Christ wrought out his salvation. He aims to imitate that self-forgetfulness. He does not wish or expect to monopolize the blessings of this life: he is willing to let others enjoy, he is willing to let others pass him.

(1) And thus, first of all, he makes peace *with* others; between himself, that is, and them. If he hears or suspects an unkind influence; if he perceives or must infer some injurious, disparaging, or unfriendly word or act, by which he is the sufferer, he determines not to seem only, but to be, as though it were not: he will not *be overcome of evil*, but

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will rather, if it be possible, *overcome evil with good.* Words soon spoken! Yet the very blessing here pronounced implies that the attainment is not easy. How ready are we, on the contrary, to resent and to retort! How does self take fire, in all of us, at the first spark of reproach or slight! How ample a justification does it appear to us of any coldness, of any taunt, of any anger, to have been made the subject of censure however just, or of suspicion however natural!

The peacemaker is not so. He has learned, in God's presence, from Christ's example, by the Spirit's grace, the divine power of not returning evil. He has been taught of God to *rule his spirit;* that higher and nobler victory, the Word of God tells us, than the siege and capture of a hostile city. He does nothing in haste: until he has regained the evenness and gentleness of his own composure, he speaks not, writes not, acts not: when he does, it is in the pursuit of peace; in the endeavour, as skilful as it is earnest, to win back to love one who has lost it and is the loser.

(2) And the same man who thus makes peace *with* others is a peacemaker too *between* others. Partly by what he does not. By *keeping his mouth*

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as with a bridle, lest he repeat that offensive word, lest he retail that injurious story, by which he might easily make, not peace, but discord. It is, I fear, too true, that if any of us should repeat to another all that his best friend had said of him, we could indeed easily separate them, easily sow a discord never to be healed. A large part of the work of the peacemaker is done in this world by a watchful silence. He trusts not to the discretion of a third person to keep to himself what he indiscreetly tells. He will trust none but himself alone with that which might make mischief. O, it is not an easy thing, even this Christian reticence! But far more difficult is the positive work, even than this negative. So many endeavours for reconciliation are frustrated by their own awkwardness—by their precipitancy, by their importunity, by their revival (for the very purpose of explanation) of rankling thoughts and painful reminiscences—that he who has peace, and peace only, in view, has need to be almost as reluctant in his meddling as he was reticent in his repeating. Most often he will find that, if peace is to be restored between discordant neighbours or estranged friends, it must be done rather by suggesting new

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thoughts of a pleasant kind than by combating old thoughts of a painful nature; by seizing some unlooked for opportunity, such as the Providence of God sometimes gives to His servants, of recounting in the hearing of the one a kindly word dropped by the other—of drawing forth on the one side some little token of reviving love, needing rather to be received than reciprocated on the other—and so of enjoying that purest of all earthly satisfactions, the sight of long-severed hands reunited in friendship, lives long and widely divergent flowing once again, and flowing for ever, in one harmonious stream of Christian amity.

(3) I ventured to speak of a Christian as making peace not only with, and between, but also *for* others. In so saying, we go back to the thought of a peace higher than any between man and man; even to that best and truest and most enduring peace which is between a man and his God. We have not recognized the existence of any but a Christian peacemaker. Whenever we have seen one member of a family—probably a sister or a daughter—pre-eminently marked out as the peacemaker, we have always seen that character associated with another; even with the character of one

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who was first at peace within with God. And therefore we assume that the peacemaker, not satisfied with seeing men at one with each other, will be above all things anxious that each should be personally reconciled to God. The only real way of turning (as the Prophet says in the last verses of the Old Testament) *the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers*, is to turn both (as the Evangelist applies the words) *to the wisdom of the just.* It is in God alone that men truly meet and are at one. Therefore the peacemaker deals not with the symptom only: he goes to the root and heart of the disease. He desires to make peace for men, by bringing them to seek that peace in God. Every work of good, which has the souls of men for its object, has the peacemaker for its friend. Most of all, that deepest and most personal work—from which many shrink who do not shrink from more public and gregarious offices of charity—the work of seeking one particular soul, of tracing out the tangled thread of an individual life, and by long, patient, untiring labour guiding it towards that point of rest which is to be found only through Christ in God. The peacemaker

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between men is a peacemaker also for men. At the very head and spring of the bitter waters he would throw in that living and life-giving tree of the grace of God, which is for the restoring and the sweetening and the healing of them all.

3. And now, in the last place, we must say one word upon the benediction and its reason. *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

The peacemaker is a happy man even now. He has more of God's direct work to do than any other person. His office, as such, is the very office of God Himself. What is God Himself engaged in? Is it not He who causes and who maintains the peace of nature, the harmony of the universe? Do you suppose that the orderly course of sun and moon, of times and seasons, of vegetation and produce, of seedtime and harvest—all that complex and yet unit mechanism which we briefly call Nature—goes on of itself, or would go on for one moment if God forsook, if God forgot it? God is the great Peacemaker, the one Harmonizer and Reconciler, even in these material things. And who is He that, in the remarkable language of the Book of Psalms, *maketh men to be of one*

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mind in an house? Who is He that has knit together human hearts in ties of kindred and affection, of instinct and choice? Who has made friendship natural, and love a necessity of man? God, again: God the great Peacemaker; the Divine Uniter and Reconciler. And need I speak of that higher work of peace, which is in the heart and in the soul of the fallen? of that first and final act of reconciliation, the message of which is the Gospel? of that recalling and reuniting and readjusting of man's scattered and warring elements, which is the offer, and the accomplishment too, of the Holy and Divine Spirit? In all these things, to make peace is God's office, God's prerogative.

But this, like all His works of grace, God delegates, in part, and deputes to His servants. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.* Even so, *Be ye therefore peacemakers, as your Father also is the Peacemaker.* And if so, blessed are ye: for ye shall *be called the children of God.* We have seen why this is so. The child bears the father's likeness: they who are like God are His children: and the peacemaker is, of all, the likest God. *As many as are led by the Spirit of God,*

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they are the sons of God; and the choicest fruit of the Spirit is peace and peacemaking.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God! Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. If this be the present happiness, and this the certain hope, of the Christian peacemaker, it needs surely no word of man to draw us towards his office.

Let not this seventh Benediction pass ever out of your remembrance. All is discord below, save one thing only. That one thing is, what Scripture calls *the peace of God.* And well may the same Scripture add, *which passeth all understanding. Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth.* He who would know what it is to be at unity within; he who would be able to choose that which is good, and also to do it; he who would possess certainty amidst doubt, light in darkness, and rest in change; he who would lie down each night fearless of death, and awaken each morning strong for duty; he who would be able to say in life, *I have set God alway before me,* and

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in death, *I know whom I have believed;* let him listen to the Gospel message, *On earth peace:* let him listen to the Gospel message, *Thy sins are forgiven thee:* let him listen to the Gospel message, *Jesus Christ the same yesterday and to-day and for ever—If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!*

And when he has found peace, then let him make it! make it, by a steadfast, an unprovokable charity; make it, by an earnest, an invincible self-forgetfulness; make it, by a resolute, a single-minded endeavour to draw others towards that happiness which he has first tasted! So living, so labouring—so labouring, and so dying—his shall be the benediction pronounced once by the Saviour below, *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God!*

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VI.

WHO ARE HAPPY?—EIGHTH AND LAST ANSWER.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."—Matt. v. 10—12.

THE eighth Beatitude or Benediction thus expands itself into a personal address. *Blessed are they. Blessed are ye.* It is the connecting link between the more abstract delineation of the Christian character, and that close practical application which forms the bulk of this Divine Sermon.

Each one of the Beatitudes is in some sense

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a paradox: a saying not after the manner of man; a saying which contradicts man's opinion, and is a distinct cross to flesh and blood. Blessed are, not the rich, but the poor. Blessed, not the joyful, but the sorrowful. Blessed, not the self-satisfied, not the triumphant, not the magnificent; but the meek, and the merciful, and the peacemaker, and the pure. But how much more this one which is now before us! Blessed are they that actually suffer; the despised, the ill-used, the maligned and the reviled, the solitary and the outcast!

Let us endeavour, as before, first to understand the condition spoken of, and then to see the connexion between it and its blessing.

1. The words used to describe the condition itself are strong words.

They which are persecuted. The term properly denotes *pursued;* hunted hither and thither by an active and restless foe. It is a condition of unrest; of perpetual disquiet and distress: and that, not from anxious thoughts merely, and not from painful circumstances only, but from the actual hostility and violence of cruel and wicked men.

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Again, *when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you.* Bad deeds, bad intentions, bad motives, shall be imputed to you. You shall be suspected of things which your soul abhors: you shall be accused of self-righteousness, illiberality, uncharitableness, misanthropy, because you testify against the world, by word and by example, that its deeds are evil; because you warn men, by word and by example, to flee from the wrath to come. You shall find yourselves isolated when you are yearning for sympathy, and hated where your whole soul is gone forth in love.

How these things were fulfilled in our Lord's first Disciples, it is needless to remind you. The record is in all history, profane or sacred. One Book of Scripture, the Acts of the Apostles, is full of it. Church history, till within a century or two of our own time, is full of it. Even in our own time cruel martyrdoms have taken place—it is a narrative full of interest—in the dark places of idolatry and heathenism. But these things, by God's mercy, have not come nigh us. To speak to us of persecution to be endured for the sake of Christ, would be to mock or to trifle. And yet I could not pass the text over: it lay in our

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very path: what can I say of it which shall be applicable to this age, to this country, to ourselves? Something surely: for *the Word of God is quick and powerful*, and has a voice (might he but hear it) for every man.

Suppose we were to read it as a reproof only —that we have not been persecuted—that we have not upon us this mark of a living Christianity—might there not be profit even so? Surely the thought should awaken in us some searchings of heart: how is it that this Beatitude, this Benediction of Christ, is inapplicable to me? How is it that I have avoided reproach, that I have escaped obloquy, that I have been ignorant of all suffering, in my Saviour's behalf? Can it be that I have been true to the Cross, and yet found in it no offence? that I have waged my warfare bravely, and yet met no antagonist? that I have been Christ's *faithful soldier and servant*, and yet awakened no dislike and no hostility? This can only be where a whole household, a whole circle, is in deed and in truth Christian: is it so with mine? As a general rule, No cross, no crown! *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!* The faithful Christian, he *who will* indeed *live godly in Christ*

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Jesus, shall suffer persecution. O, there has probably been in me a great timidity; a culpable reticence on points of faith and duty, or else a systematic compromise with that which was displeasing to my Master! He says, *Blessed are ye, when men shall separate you from their company:* and men have sought mine. He says, *Blessed are ye, when men shall cast out your name as evil:* and men have done nothing of that sort with mine. The thing must be looked into: why is it?

But I think it very probable that I address at least one or two who have suffered, who are suffering, if not persecution, yet at least discomfort, at least misunderstanding, at least isolation, for the sake (as they believe) of fidelity to the Gospel. Sometimes one daughter, one sister, in a family, is more deeply or more early impressed with the fear of sin and of judgment, than the rest of the household. She begins to value the means of grace; to make sacrifices for the sake of frequenting the House of God; to feel a scruple, where others feel none, as to the lawfulness of certain amusements or certain companionships; at all events, to be pained by a spirit of perpetual levity as to subjects and persons connected with

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the thought of eternity and of God. Now that member of the household becomes at once, and in proportion to the consistency and vigour of the Christian profession, a sort of embodied conscience to the rest. They cannot keep that conscience quiet as they can their own. It moves and acts; and each motion, each action, of that conscience is a reproach to them. Hence annoyance, irritation, discussion, perhaps ridicule, perhaps reproach, at last something nearly allied to disaffection and dislike. To this extent persecution is by no means a thing unknown even in Christian times and nominally Christian homes.

Now if there is any one here present whose life is of the kind thus described, I would earnestly, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, bid him or her to listen to this text and be comforted. *Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.* You are now bearing upon you one of the tokens of a Christian indeed. See that you rather give thanks for this than repine at it. *Unto you it is given,* St. Paul says, *not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His*

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sake. Only take good heed to the exact words here written. *For righteousness' sake. Falsely, for my sake.* Remember, the promise is not to those who provoke hostility wantonly; to those who make their religion offensive, either by needless singularities, or by harsh judgments, or by evil tempers. Take good heed to yourselves, that, when you give offence and suffer for it, it is indeed *for righteousness' sake;* for something which is a matter of principle, of right and wrong. Let no wilfulness and no perverseness, no censorious word or angry retort, mar the beauty of that profession which should be altogether of Christ, and for Christ, and like Christ. *Then* if you suffer, *happy are ye! The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified.*

And surely on the other side also a serious thought should be awakened by the words on which we have dwelt. If the persecuted, if the reviled and hated, for Christ's sake, are blessed, what of the persecutor? I know he does not so call himself: he speaks rather of the weakness, of the folly, of the absurdity, of the other: he asks,

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what can be the harm of this or that? or he points to some blemish in the other's faithfulness, some unguarded word wrung from a provoked spirit, or perhaps some compromise, weak and unwise, previously made and vainly. But there is One, whose eye is upon the heart. And if He sees there a careless spirit, a dislike and a repugnance to serious religion, a wish to make out all conduct to be indifferent and all piety a dream, He will not accept as an excuse for your unkindness even the faultiness of His servant: He will regard as against Himself one who is so manifestly not with Him: He will place beside the blessing upon the persecuted a woe to the persecutor, and estimate at its due worthlessness that sort of faith in Him which as a form and custom you yourself may profess.

The words now under consideration were spoken of Christians among unbelievers: but they have come to be too true as concerning Christians among Christians. Who that then listened to them would have believed that one Christian could ever persecute another Christian, and that for being so—for being a Christian? We have lived to see it. We rise now in a Christian congregation, and say,

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Blessed are they among you whom others among you persecute! I would that we might think of this. We have lost something, in this last quarter of a century, of the sharpness of that contrast which, if in one way painful, was in another salutary; I mean, the contrast between different parts of the professed Church as to the being or not being Christians indeed. There has been a gradual fading of the line of demarcation, until at length it has almost vanished. And this, I fear, too often, not by the absorption of the careless in the faithful, but by an agreement and compromise between the two—all shall profess, and none shall be! Not altogether this—God be praised—but too much so. And then, when a real anxiety is shown in any quarter not only to call Christ Lord, but really to do the things which He says, the slumbering hostility wakes again into activity, and he who seemed to be with Christ is found once more arrayed against Him. Let us try and judge ourselves, my brethren, that we be not judged of the Lord!

2. And now, in the second and last place, we were to inquire what is the connexion between the condition spoken of and its blessing; between a state of persecution, and the benediction or

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beatitude pronounced upon it, *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* We shall find two things here.

(1) Persecution has ever been a mark of the faithful. *So persecuted they the prophets which were before you.* The children of one family have commonly the sign of likeness. Brothers are known by strangers from their resemblance to each other as well as to a common parent. It is so in spiritual things. There is a resemblance of character, and there is a resemblance also of condition, between different members of God's household. And this from the very beginning. The Epistle to the Hebrews has drawn it out, in one memorable chapter, as regards the likeness of character. All have been men of faith. From Abel downwards that has been the spiritual mark of all God's children. They differed widely, in different ages, in point of knowledge. One saw darkly, another saw in open vision, the day of Christ. One was instructed by type, another by prophecy, and another by a Gospel, as to the verities of propitiation and redemption. But all alike lived and died in faith. All alike *endured as seeing the Invisible.* All alike hoped against hope in the coming of a Saviour and the final triumph of His

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kingdom. Thus all, when they meet at length in the mansions of a heavenly home, will meet as already brethren: brethren, not more in their relation to one Father, than in their possession of one mind, one principle, and one likeness.

Even thus is it, not only with the likeness of character, but with the likeness of condition. All alike have suffered. Each one separately has been *made perfect*, like his Master, *through sufferings*.

Of course this has been so in reference to the personal experience both of sorrow and of conflict. To no one of God's servants has this world been all smooth. Scarcely one—no one, if he lived to full age—has failed to be a sufferer through separation and bereavement. No one, young or old, if he was indeed faithful, has failed to be a sufferer through the conflict with sin. Many a secret struggle has there been—not always a successful struggle—with original sin in its workings and in its lustings within. Where sin is, even in its root and in its germ, there must be suffering; suffering in resistance, or else suffering in remorse. And even they who have known least of this personal suffering—whether from goodness of natural disposition or from an early pre-occupation

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with principles and habits of holiness—have had something of it in contact with others; in association and intercourse with a world lying in wickedness, and with the calamities and miseries growing therefrom to their brethren. Thus the condition of all God's saints has been in some degree one of likeness in suffering.

But the text carries this further, and suggests also a likeness in persecution.

I need not say that all those of whom Scripture tells were persecuted men. *All the prophets, from Samuel, and those that follow after*, were men who had experience of reproach and reviling, of isolation, opposition, and oppression.

But is it not in some measure true still—true of all men?

I know there have been persons of such rare sweetness of temper, such unwonted attractiveness of disposition and character, that men were forced into praise. It was so with one of the Prophets. *The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.* It was so with One greater still. *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.* It was so in the earliest days of the Christian Church.

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Great grace was upon them all. The people magnified them. But we know how soon the scene changed: how soon favour was turned into repugnance, and admiration into hostility! No Christian life, it may be said with truth, has been carried to its close without (in some way or other) suffering persecution.

A very bright example must reprove. A true Christian needs not to open his lips: his life is his sermon. Noah was *a preacher of righteousness* by just building his ark—nothing more: *by it he reproved the world.* And reproof, most of all the reproof of act, is always disliked. It is a mark of grace to bear it. A true Christian is often forced into isolation. And to him, even above others, isolation is distress. Isolation itself is persecution. The boy who stands alone among his schoolfellows because he will speak the truth, knows what this costs; knows that to be alone—if it be but in the sense of loneliness, without words of reproach—is pain enough, is already persecution, is already a cross. Happy he who has grace then to remember the words, *Yea, and if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye*—or these others, *Blessed are they which are*

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persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

(2) Finally, persecution is a favourable state for heaven. *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* We all know what the effect of praise is: how it puts us (as we say) into good humour with the life that is; how it makes our roots strike deeper into the soil of earth; how it tends to make the world more real and more important, heaven more shadowy and more distant. The times when we have most readily fallen have been times of praise and consequent self-complacency. The times when we have been conscious of an unusual indisposition for prayer and duty have been times of esteem for us from the world. Yes, we can bear but little, the best of us, in the way of flattery and of importance. We are better kept low. We want taking down and keeping down. And therefore, when the world is hard upon us; when our little enterprises are unnoticed and uncommended; when our insignificance makes itself felt, and we see ourselves as we are, small and unimportant in reference to the work and to the interests even of our little generation; above all, when we are made to perceive that he must be for ever solitary (as to all that

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is real companionship) who will not make a friend of God, and that he must in the end be *lightly esteemed* who lives for the admiration and the applause of men;—then it is that we are nearest, in soul and spirit, to the great invisible realities: then it is that *the city which* alone *hath foundations* shows itself to the eye of faith in its majesty and in its glory: then it is that we best realize St. Paul's saying, *Our conversation (citizenship) is* already *in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* A state of persecution—or at least of that disesteem and conscious isolation which is akin to it in essence—is not more the mark of the saints than it is a help towards heaven. *Blessed* therefore *are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

If God's mercy keeps from us, in these soft days, anything of such suffering from others as deserves the name of persecution, let us at least deal thankfully with Him for this by making sure our foundation, that it rest not upon the sand of a present tranquillity, but be founded upon the rock of a true conviction and a deep personal faith. If not in life, at least when death

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comes, we shall want something independent of men's opinion, and irrespective of the world's praise. Shall we be able to stand alone then? Die we must alone: how will it be with those who are then for the first time learning their isolation; then for the first time finding that human esteem, as well as worldly wealth, must be left behind, when the body goes to its earth, and the spirit returns to Him who gave it? God give us grace to be courageous now, with that courage which springs at once out of intercourse with Him; out of close personal communion with Him who is at once truth and love, at once Almighty and all-merciful! We are cowards because the world is all to us: if we lose that, we lose all. Let us learn betimes a better happiness and a more abiding trust. *If God be for us, who can be against us?* He who fears God, fears none beside: and he who sees before him the home of eternal love, can bear to be sometimes solitary in the way to it. So be it with us! Brave, as trusting in God: gentle, as seeking to draw others to Him!

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VII.

WHAT ARE CHRISTIANS?—TWO ANSWERS.

"Ye are the salt of the earth. . . . Ye are the light of the world."—Matt. v. 13, 14.

ALT—and light. Two most expressive symbols of what Christians ought to be in their relation to each other and to the world.

We have heard what a Christian is in his own character; that is, by the grace of God working in him. Humble, and meek, mourning over sin, longing after holiness, pure in heart, merciful in spirit, a peacemaker between others, and a patient sufferer for righteousness' sake—this is what he is: by these signs you may know him: by these tests must we try ourselves, if we would know what manner of spirit we are of.

And now the discourse takes an onward step,

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and enters into the influence which such a character, formed in a man by grace, will have upon the world in which it dwells. *Ye are the salt of the earth. . . . Ye are the light of the world.*

1. Scripture figures often lose by their transplantation from an Oriental into a Western soil. It is but faintly that we can realize what *water* is under an Eastern sun or in a parched arid wilderness. And so with the figure now before us. We commonly think of salt chiefly as the relish of food. We connect it with Job's question. *Can that which is unsavoury*, he asks, *be eaten without salt?* But in the East salt was more than this. In that climate it was the very life of life; the universal antidote to decay and putrefaction. It must enter into everything, or the food of man and beast would fall rapidly to corruption and decay.

And thus salt became the very word for uncorruptness, sincerity, fidelity.

In the Book of Numbers, for example, we read of a particular ordinance of the Law of God, *It is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.* And in one of the Books of Chronicles, Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, king of Judah, thus appeals to the rival host of Jero-

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boam, king of Israel: *Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?* Salt, the antidote of corruption in material substances, becomes the emblem of all that is constant, faithful, and permanent in the dealings of man with man and in the relations of man with God.

It is from the same cause that, in a famous miracle of the prophet Elisha, salt is used as the signal of healing. *The men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.* The salt was not the instrument, it was the emblem, of the healing. It typifies all that is either preventive or corrective of corruption.

One example more. We find in the Law of Moses a very positive direction with reference to the universal use of salt in sacrifices. *Every*

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oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from the meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt. It is to this rule that our Lord Himself refers, when He says, *For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.* Whatever other symbolical meanings this regulation may have contained, it is at least clear that it reminded the offerer of the need of uncorruptness, of purity both in life and in heart, on the part of all who would approach God acceptably with a sacrifice of thanksgiving or of worship.

Now therefore we have the text full in view. *Ye are the salt of the earth.* What salt is to meat destined for food, that are ye to the earth: an element of purity and of soundness, whether in the way of prevention or of correction, to the nations, and to the families, and to the individuals, of mankind. It is your office so to act upon human life, in its public, social, domestic, and personal workings, as that you shall gradually correct in it that which is corrupt and vicious, and even (so far as in you lies) anticipate and pre-occupy evil with good.

No one can read ancient history, or be ac-

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quainted ever so slightly with classical literature, without perceiving how much the Gospel of Christ has done in the correction and reformation of human life. It has indeed been like the salt thrown in by Elisha at the spring of the waters, for the renovation of decayed principle and the restoration of (at least) an idea of and a respect for virtue. These things are matters of notoriety: would that it could be said that the work of Christianity in the earth was either thorough in its endeavours or complete in its success!

And therefore we come down from large views and grand surveys to the little microscopic scrutiny of a few individual lives. *Ye see your calling, brethren.* We see what Christ meant us to be, not on a grand scale, but in our own little place and sphere. Each one of us was meant to act upon the little society to which we are personally confined, as salt acts upon the substances with which it is mingled. I know nothing more expressive as to our duty, or more simple in its application to the individual conscience. Am I doing all in my power to keep my little influence upon others altogether pure, altogether salubrious? For example, is my speech, as St. Paul says, *always*

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with grace, seasoned with salt? uniformly pure and reverent, kind and improving? Is it plain to all my friends that I honestly abhor that which is evil? that I cannot bear falsehood, profaneness, impurity? that I believe in Christ with all my soul, and love God with all my heart? If it be so with me, then I am acting, in my humble measure, as the salt of the earth. This was what Christians were meant to do; to influence the world—one here, and one there—one in this generation, and one in that—towards all that is good and against all that is evil.

But our Lord here teaches us, that it may be far otherwise, even with those who in name and by profession are His disciples. He goes on to speak of salt that has lost its savour: salt that has become, by exposure to weather or damp, insipid, flat, and worthless. And then He asks what remedy there is for such a condition.

We have all heard the saying, *The corruption of the best is worst.* The better a thing is in its integrity, the worse is it if it loses that perfection. And not to pursue that statement into particulars, apply it at once to this topic. Salt is the counteractor of corruption in other substances. What

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is to be done if the counteractor of corruption has itself become corrupt? It is said, and most truly, *There is no salt of salt.* There is nothing which can act as salt to salt itself; nothing which by its application can give back to damaged salt its lost pungency, or enable that to preserve which has failed to preserve itself.

How solemn a warning, when we pass to the thing signified! History is full of its illustrations. What does a nation become which has parted with its manliness? What does a Church become which has lost its life? What does a family become which has sacrificed its ancestral virtue? What does a man become who has gone back from Christ? The salt which has lost its savour *is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* Whole Churches left their first love, and the very candlestick was taken out of its place in judgment. Whole nations have denied their Christianity, and have been unchurched for it in judgment. Separate congregations, once blessed with Gospel light, were careless of it, and have been suffered to walk in a darkness which they had chosen. Whole towns have made their choice between God and mammon, have

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made that choice for mammon, and the Gospel which has been left to them has been a shell without a kernel, a name without a power.

The particular point is, the contempt with which the saltless salt is treated. *Fit neither for the land nor yet for the dunghill, men* just *cast it out.* The highway of the world is strewn with this reprobate Christianity. What disdain is equal to that which befalls the immoral priest or the detected hypocrite? Well might Christ say, *Of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed*: nay, he waits not for the disdain of the Saviour—the world despises and tramples him under foot by anticipation!

Christians are set for the salt of the earth: to keep it, or else to rescue it, from corruption; to be in it a principle of moral soundness, pervading its various ranks and classes with a spirit altogether salubrious, pure, and good. To do this at all, they must first *be* pure, *be* good. It is not by the look that salt acts: and it is not by the appearance, or by the profession, or by the talk, that Christians influence. It is by first *being* Christians. Who can tell how much he has counteracted his own profession by his own inconsistency? Who can tell what he might not have

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done, had he kept well in mind this parable of the saltless salt? Let it be impressed upon us, by God's grace, this day! Hitherto perhaps we have thought that our only business was with ourselves; that the only question was—and perhaps that not a vital one—how we ourselves were comporting ourselves as to sin or virtue. Now let us learn—God write the lesson in our hearts—that we were designed and commissioned, all of us—not one particular class, pledged by profession and by ordination to that duty, but all, all of us—to be the salt of the earth; to do everything in our power, by word, by persuasion, by influence, by example, to make those around us more pure, more religious, more thoughtful, more Christ-like, than they would have been without us. And let us learn also that, if we do not this, we are like the salt which is losing its saltness: fit for neither world: belying our profession here; and preparing to be ashamed before Christ, yea, to find Him ashamed of us, at a day when it will be too late to amend. *Too late!*

2. The first part of the text speaks of Christian action under the figure of salt; the second under that of light. The difference is obvious: and yet

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they are only parts of one whole. The action of salt is silent and secret; the operation of light is patent and ostensible. The former figure points to the insensible influence of Christians in affecting the moral and spiritual condition of those amongst whom they live: the latter, to their more direct endeavour to draw men towards the love of God and the service of Christ.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

If *God has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ*, it is the very meaning of that illumination, that it be diffusive. That which God Himself is, He is for communication: that He may give out of His fulness to the creatures which He has made. It is the very glory of the Creator to impart. It was the very motto of the Redeemer's life below, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Everything, in God's world as He made it—as

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it was when He first looked upon it in its completion and pronounced it to be *very good*—is made to give out, to communicate, and to hand on. A self-contained being belongs, of right, to nothing and to no one. Most of all is this true with regard to those who, in a higher than any creation sense, have received out of the Divine fulness. They who are being made (as the Scripture says) *partakers of the Divine nature* by an actual possession of the Holy Spirit, are constituted, by the very fact of their being so, transmitters and communicators of the light which they derive. *Ye are the light of the world.* To suppose otherwise; to dream of a condition of mere spiritual luxury; of an intercourse with God, or a likeness to God, or a union with God, which was for one's self alone; would be to suppose that a lighted candle may shine for itself under a bushel, when its one use, its only meaning, is, to *give light to all that are in the house.*

Thus our Lord teaches us a grave lesson as to the sin of religious selfishness. If your mind has one spark of divine knowledge, or your soul one ray of divine comfort, that spark, that ray, must be made useful in some manner to others. You

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have no right to it otherwise. You are *withholding the pledge;* forgetting the difference between a possession and a trust. You are kindled by God into a light of the world, that you may give light at least to those who are in your house—yes, and a little more still!

Some of us make it their one business to hide their light. They have such a dread of hypocrisy—such a mistrust of their own stability—but, worse than this (for this, if it were all, would be true and laudable), such a selfish view of religion, as though it were designed only to make them tranquil and comfortable, and had done its office when it had accomplished this—that they will even boast of keeping themselves to themselves, glory in that isolation which is all unchristian, and forget that the use of the light is a responsibility rising instantly and inevitably out of its possession. We do well to know our own weakness: we do well to tremble lest, after running well, we should be hindered, snared, or lost: but we do not well when we make these into reasons for being neglectful of a first duty; that of letting our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and so glorify our Father which is in heaven.

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The text, in its latter half, furnishes two concluding lessons.

(1) Let men *see your good works.*

Then, first, your works must be good: then, secondly, you must let them be seen.

It is quite conceivable that there might be one of these things without the other. A man might wrestle in prayer in his secret chamber. A man might struggle earnestly with his sins in his secret life. A man might cherish every pure thought, and walk humbly and mournfully before the Lord of hosts. And yet he might never put forth any decided influence on the side to which he personally was devoted. He might so conceal his principles—he might even so disguise himself under an affectation of indifference—as to neutralize the effect of his own goodness. It is possible: it has been done. Now that man forgets the precept to let his light shine before men. He is covering it with a vessel: he is putting it under a bed: and so the very light itself is not allowed to shine.

Do I not address some who greatly need this admonition? Some of you are far, far better —I mean, more thoughtful, more religious, more Christian—than you allow others to suppose you.

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This is better than the opposite. It is better, no doubt, to be dissemblers of good than to be dissemblers of evil. It is better to let others think less well of you, than wilfully to make others think more highly of you, than you deserve. But I would beg you to notice that your influence for good is thus entirely negatived. The most we can hope of you is, that you are not influencing others for evil. If this had been the universal aim of Christians, there might indeed have been little tapers burning here and there in closets and secret chambers with the doors shut about them, but there would have been no such thing as a *light of the world;* a Christian body, shining before men in its aggregate and in its members; testifying to the reality of Christ, and winning men, by a bright example, to the side of truth and faith and love.

(2) Lastly, notice the object of all. *That they may glorify your Father which is in heaven.* The light comes from Him, and to His glory it should return. It is not the object of Christian living to make men say, That is a good man: but rather to make men say, If such is the beauty and such the power of a reflected light, how glorious

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must that Sun be at which all lesser luminaries kindle and replenish their brightness!

Alas! many forget this. Many think that the work is done, for them, when they are safe; when they can say, I am happy; when they can say, I am now ready to depart, and to be with Christ. Selfishness, our original sin, shows itself even in the things of God. And selfishness, wheresoever shown, is weakness, is poverty, is unhappiness. A man is strong, and a man is rich, and a man is happy, just in proportion as he can think less of himself and more of God: just in proportion as he can say, Let me decrease, that Christ may increase: let me be nothing and have nothing, if only God may be better known, more honoured, and more loved. The object with which Christ came, and ministered, and suffered, and died, was, that He might make God known; that He might bear witness to the Divine reality, and take away that heavy cloud which obscured from the sight of man the Divine brightness. Even thus should it be with Christ's servants. If they walk worthily of Him, if they are enabled to overcome sin, if they are strengthened to follow Christ's example and to show forth Christ's resurrection life; they,

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in the same degree, glorify their Father in heaven; show Him, that is, to be what He is; such in power, such in mercy, such in faithfulness, and such in love. *Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.* Let all men know Thee, and honour Thee, and regard Thee, and reverence Thee, and remember Thee, as that holy and all-pure God which Thou indeed art—which Thou hast revealed Thyself! That is the high object proposed to a Christian life: to glorify God: to show Him to be that which He is.

When we can learn this lesson—to think of God first—to count it of more importance that He should be known than that we should be honoured—to estimate all that we do and all that we suffer, in its bearing upon the glory of God our Father—then we shall grow apace in all that is pure and lovely and of good report. Then will nothing come amiss to us: even chastisement, even punishment, even judgment, will be accepted as necessary to the disclosure of God's character as the All-just, the All-holy, and the All-wise. Then will life have lost half its embarrassment by losing all its doubleness. One end, one aim, one all-guiding and all-per-

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vading motive, will make every circumstance a means to an end: that end, the manifestation of His being, whom to know is eternal life, whom to serve is perfect freedom.

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VIII.

CHRIST INTERPRETS THE LAW.—FIVE EXAMPLES.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—Matt. v. 48.

E have read the description of the Christian character, as Christ Himself here unfolds it. And we have read the brief words in which, under two similitudes, He sets before His disciples their office and their responsibility. *Ye are the salt of the earth:* beware lest that salt lose its preserving virtue, and become yet worse and more worthless than the corrupt mass which it was set to bring back out of its putrefaction. *Ye are the light of the world:* beware lest that light be put under a bushel, and so be left shining, if shining, for itself alone. Let your light shine, as it ought to shine, before men—let it give light (at least) to all that are

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in your house—that they, seeing your good works, may glorify, in them and for them, your Father which is in heaven.

This in general. And in general terms none perhaps gainsays the duty. But man's life is not lived in the general: it is made up of a vast multitude of little details; the sum of which *is* the life; the putting together of all which, and the tracing up of all which to their secret spring in the principle and in the motive, in the mind and in the soul, is the judgment; is that great reading of hearts, and that great explaining of mysteries, and that great assignment of destinies, for which the world is daily sowing, and in which shall be the grand reaping.

Therefore He who is to be the Judge must go into details: must set before us our duty, in a few bold master-strokes, which it shall be the business of the Church's ministry, and the business of the individual conscience, to fill in and to complete and to colour according to the age and the race, according to the condition and the circumstance, throughout man's generations to the last day of time.

My desire is rather to open than to exhaust the

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sacred spring out of which we draw the living and life-giving record of our Saviour's teaching and working below. And therefore, instead of pausing upon each verse and each clause of this first and fullest of His inspired utterances, I would connect the parts of it together, and place before you a few leading particulars, to be completed as well as digested by private study and thought and prayer. We have here the Gospel code of morality: was there ever elsewhere presented to mankind a system at once so wise and so simple, so lofty and so profound?

He begins by a serious assurance that He is *not come*—and I would beg you to mark the phrase by which He claims for Himself the character of the promised Messiah, known for long ages under the title of *Him that should come*—He is not come *to destroy, but to fulfil:* not come to upset the teaching of earlier Dispensations; not come to revolutionize religion by the introduction of a novel system of faith and duty; but come to complete and crown all previous Revelations by one which should make known to mankind a Saviour in whom they may find rest, and a Spirit in whom they may find light, for their souls. *Christ is the*

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end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The end of the Law and the Prophets; the terminus even more than the termination of all that God in times past, *in sundry parts and in divers manners*, had spoken by lawgiver or prophet, by precept or prediction, by type or sign or open vision. The Holy Bible of the Christian tells us on its title-page that it *contains both the Old and New Testaments.*

Not one word which God has really spoken shall ever really pass away. *Till heaven and earth pass*—such is the destined duration of every jot and tittle—every minutest letter and every minutest stroke of each letter—of the Divine Law. And whosoever breaks, and teaches men to break, one of the very least of these perennial commandments, he shall sink to the lowest place in, if he does not sink absolutely out of, that kingdom of heaven which is the Gospel Church of God.

But then there is a clinging to the form, which is a desertion of the spirit; and there is a reconstruction of the fashion, which is a permanence of the principle and of the life. The Pharisee by a puerile literalism ate out the very life of God's Law; made it an unwholesome and a disgusting ritual, instead

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of being a witness for holiness and a prophecy of redemption. That was no honour to the Law of God: that was not a doing and a teaching which could stand its ground within the pale of a Revelation which was all light, and a Gospel which was all spirit. Therefore, *except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees*—exceed it in its sincerity, exceed it in its holiness, exceed it in its spirituality, exceed it in its liberty, exceed it in its love, exceed it (to speak briefly) in its likeness to God—*ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Such is the introduction and preamble to the law of liberty. And now glance for a few moments at some of its clauses. You will find them (within the limits of this chapter) to be five in number. Each one is expressed in the form of a contrast. A maxim or a commandment is taken out of the Levitical law—in some instances with the addition of a Pharisee's gloss upon it—and then, so far as it is God's, it is interpreted, and, so far as it is man's, it is superseded, by a precept reaching down into the very depths of the heart, and going forth into the whole width and compass of the life.

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We may observe, in general, that when our Lord Jesus Christ sought to work in any man the conviction of sin, He often carried him straight to the second half, the second table, of the Law; spent not time and strength in reasoning with him about the love of God, but went at once to the question, more easily answered out of the conduct, of the love of man. To the Samaritan woman by the well of Sychar He says, *Go, call thy husband, and come hither.* To the rich young man He says, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* And when asked, *Which?* answers, *Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal,* &c. We might often with advantage imitate this example; and instead of labouring to convince a careless man that he loves not God, carry his thoughts into the region of relative duty, and *reason with him of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come.* Thus is it in this Divine Sermon. It takes some of the commandments of the second table, and flings upon the bare lifeless letter the illumination of the reproving, convincing, and heart-searching Spirit.

(1) *Ye have heard that it was said to them of old*

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time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But what is killing? Wherein lies the motive of murder? What is that in thee which, let alone, suffered to act freely, released from all restraints of society and of opinion, would run on into murder? Is it not hatred? Is it not malice? Is it not, as the originating or else the exciting cause, anger? Then begin *there*, for there begins the prohibiting precept —there, where God looks—there, in that heart out of which (in every sense) are the issues of life. Anger, contempt, railing—the ruffled spirit, the passionate retort, the provoking and irritating taunt —in these things see the Law of God broken; for these things dread the climax of that Divine judicature which is counterfeited below in the local justice-room, the august Sanhedrin, the horrible Gehenna: and if with these things upon thee unconfessed and unforgiven thou bring thy gift to God's altar, know that He will see in thee the spirit of the murderer, and as of old to Cain and to his offering, so to thee and to thy gift He will have no respect. Make haste then to arrange thy little differences; go back from the temple court, leaving thy offering behind thee, to become reconciled to

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thy brother: yea, quickly in life's journey make up thy quarrel with thine adversary, lest a judgment worse than of man come suddenly upon thee, and thou be left to pay off as thou canst an ineffaceable debt.

(2) And *ye have heard that it was said* in the Law of God *to them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery.* And you have thought doubtless that that warning touched only those who were guilty of the very act itself thus pointed at. Learn then, here also, that the eye of God is upon the heart. He counts as done that guilty act which is but meditated: He knows and He takes account of the evil devised, no less than the evil perpetrated: it is the pure in heart who shall see God: and he who would *attain that world, and the resurrection of the dead,* must exercise himself even now to keep a conscience void of offence; must be ready even to pluck out the right eye which is the inlet of desire, and to cut off the right hand which would else be stretched forth in sin. He who sees in hatred the spirit of the murderer, sees in lust the spirit of the adulterer. Alas! who can read without shame, even thus far, the records of the Gospel Law?

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Self-control in anger, and self-control in desire. What follows next?

(3) *Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.* The Book of Leviticus said, *Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God.* But is this all that the Gospel binds upon us in reference to appeals here below to the name and the majesty of God? Rather does it inculcate a spirit of reverence, which both shrinks from profaning things sacred, and also sees a sacredness in everything; sees in heaven God's throne, sees in earth God's footstool, sees in Jerusalem God's city, sees in the human body God's handiwork and God's possession; and therefore counts it no escape from profaneness to be able to say, *I named not God's name*, inasmuch as whatever is used as a confirmation of man's word becomes invested at once with the sanctity of the Divine contact. *Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:* simple affirmation, simple denial: let the word of a Christian man be what an oath is to the sinner: *for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.* As self-command, and

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as purity, so, thirdly, let reverence too, stamp and characterize the man to whom God has spoken in His Son.

(4) *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.* Moses *for the hardness of your heart wrote you this precept;* this law of retaliation, exact and equal, for every injury done by man to his fellow. *But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.* If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other. If a man will take from thee thy coat, by some chicanery of legal procedure, let him have thy cloak too. If a man forces thee into the service of an oppressive government, and demands the loan of thy cattle or thy toil to carry a post or to expedite a summons, give him twice what he asks of thee; if he compels thee to go one mile, go with him twain. *Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

We read the words as the Divine reversal by Christ Himself of the old law of a universal retaliation. That old law was the protection of the world's childhood from a wide-spread tyranny of force. *It was added because of transgressions,* until the true light of God should at last shine

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below. It was better than a system of brute force, in which might is right. It taught the right of possession and the sanctity of property. It held in check the worst passions and violences of a fallen nature, *until the Spirit be poured upon it from on high*, converting it into God's likeness, and ripening it for a law of love. When that day came, and the Son of God Himself taught from the Mount of the Beatitudes the principles of His Church and of His kingdom, then He bade men rather suffer wrong than resent it; bade them to submit to many aggressions which the application of law might repel or punish; at the same time that He commanded not the sudden obtrusion of this higher principle, even now, upon a society unripe for it, or its formal and literal observance where injury alike to the doer and the sufferer would be its manifest and certain result. The principle is to be an absolute forbearance: the application of that principle must be modified, as in the case of all Divine commands, by a due consideration of the circumstance, the person, the place, the time.

But have we so much as learned the principle Have we learned, in any the smallest particular, to

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be willing to take wrong? And if in any instance we seek the redress of a wrong, is it because a serious, disinterested regard to the good of others convinces us that Christ Himself, in our place, would keep the spirit of His precept by modifying its form?

(5) There is yet a fifth and last word, like to the former, but carrying its principle into a wider field and sphere. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and* (as a narrow and miserable gloss of the Scribe added) *hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* Narrow not the circle of your sympathies to those who belong to you, or to those who love you. Even the despised publican can do that. Even he salutes his friends: even he loves his brother. Yours is a higher aim, a nobler effort. Count nothing attained until you can love as God loves; regardless of merit, regardless of the reciprocity of love in the receiver;

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loving because you would be like God; loving because God has first loved you. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

And what then shall we say to these things? Where is he amongst us who knows anything in his own soul of this sort of love? The fourth precept, that of taking wrong, may need sometimes to be modified by a fear of inflicting wrong in suffering it; of injuring society, and injuring too the wrong-doer, by giving free scope to his wickedness: but the fifth, that of a universal love, needs no modifying for any: we cannot hurt a man by loving him: we cannot injure society by praying for a persecutor: and therefore the sincere heart will try itself rather by this precept than by that; rather by a universal charity than by a necessarily conditional acceptance of wrong. Charity may sometimes demand the punishment of a wrong-doer: but against charity itself there can be no law; no higher and more comprehensive principle regulating and sometimes limiting its application. You can love your enemy even while (if need be) you punish.

We have spoken of high things to-day; and

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they have been crowded upon you with something of an oppressive accumulation. The sixth commandment, and the seventh, each transformed and spiritualized; in other words, the law of self-control in passion and in appetite; the great all-pervading reverence, which sees God everywhere, and counts nothing common which He has cleansed or consecrated; the law of mutual forbearance, of submission to evil—let me rather say, of overcoming evil with good; and then, last of all, the Divine perfection of charity set before us as an ambition, as the one ladder by which we may climb into the likeness of the All-holy—or, to speak more truly, the one effluence of the inaccessible glory, by receiving which into ourselves we may reflect and give back its rays; these separate though most harmonious features of the Gospel character have been brought to us in their conjunction, and the text has bidden us to seek and to emulate all: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* I count it no discouragement if we be even overwhelmed and confounded by the charge laid upon us. To listen with a drowsy ear to a trumpet-call so inspiriting, is a far worse sign than to feel as we listen, *How can this be?* How

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shall I, a creature and a sinner, rise into a region so high above me, and become thus a partaker of the Divine nature?

Every precept of the Gospel brings with it also a prophecy and a promise. He who so loved as to die for us mocks us not, be we well assured, by setting before us an unattainable end, or pointing us to an unapproachable height. If He says, *Be ye perfect as God is perfect*, it is as though He added, *I will make you so:* I will give you of my Spirit, and *because I live, ye shall live also.* The majesty of God, and the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and the holiness of God, are indeed *far above out of our sight: such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.* But the love of God—that love which maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust—this, by His grace, man may emulate: this, by His Holy Spirit's working, sinful men and women have not only sought in Him but found. Neither poverty nor obscurity, neither ignorance nor weakness nor inexperience nor dulness, can bar this attainment. In it there is room for all, and in it all may find strength and dignity and greatness and peace.

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Let a congregation walk in this love, and men must *take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus.* Nowhere else is it even named as man's glóry. Rank and wealth, genius and beauty, all can admire, all can worship. But love, Christian love—the love of the unworthy and the sinful, the love of the enemy and oppressor, of the despiser and persecutor—that love which is the reflection of love, which loves because it has been loved, and because it would draw others to a love not earthly but Divine—this is taught only in the school of Jesus. Of Him let us all learn it, and we shall find rest to our souls. Let us learn it in His word, learn it in His worship, learn it by communion with Him in the secret chamber and at His Holy Table. And then let us go forth to live it! *Be ye imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us. This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.*

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IX.

CHRIST WARNS US AGAINST THREE COUNTERFEITS.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."—Matt. vi. 6.

VERY life has three aspects. All of us live, it may be said, three lives in one.

We live to one another. A large part of every day is spent in the exercise of relations, in the discharge of offices, which have to do with others. These relations may be well or ill exercised. These offices may be well or ill discharged. But in some way or other they must of necessity be exercised and discharged by all of us. No man (in this sense) can live altogether to himself. He must affect others. He must,

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unless he would absolutely go out of the world, act upon and act towards other men.

We live to ourselves. There is a secret life in each one of us, as well as an outward. Every man, well or ill, manages and directs himself. Every man holds the reins of his own inner being, and for good, or else for evil, is (in the last resort) his own ruler, and his own counsellor, and his own physician.

We live to God. Either negligently or else watchfully, either presumptuously or else reverently, either disobediently or else dutifully, each one of us must behave and deport himself somehow and in some manner towards the Most High God; towards Him in whom, whether he will or no, he lives and moves and has his being. To have nothing to do with God, is to have cast aside utterly the first law of our being, and in the highest possible degree to be blaspheming and defying Him daily. The creature must have a life towards the Creator: the only question is, what manner of life? a life of rebellion, or a life of love?

It is with reference to this threefold life of man that St. Paul says, in his Epistle to Titus, that we ought to *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this*

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present world. Soberly, towards ourselves: righteously, towards one another: godly, that is, religiously or piously, towards God Himself.

The passage which we reach to-day in the Sermon on the Mount, suggests, and indeed presupposes, the same threefold division of the life of man. It takes an example of the working of each of these three lives, and cautions us as to its special risks and possible abuses. Each several example is taken from the *religious* working of the life to which it belongs. It is to His disciples that our Lord addresses Himself; to those who are professing to ask what they must do to be saved and how they shall manifest that life which He offers to communicate and to implant within.

1. At the close of the last section of His discourse He had summoned them to a life of universal, of self-forgetting, of invincible charity. To love their enemies, to bless them that curse, to do good to them that hate, to pray for them which treat despitefully and persecute—thus to emulate the Divine perfection—thus to grow into the likeness of Him who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust—this is the compass of

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that duty, this the height of that ambition, which Christ our Saviour proposes to us who come to Him for direction. Thus, He says, even thus, *be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

And then the transition is natural to a possible *counterfeit* of this perfection. When once it has come to be understood that Christian consistency demands as one of its first conditions a life of compassion and of beneficence, then will arise, in this bad world, a system of professed but not of real charity: a short road will be made to that character which (to be worth anything) must be heart-deep: men will agree together to look charitable: they will make arrangements for the recognition of an outside virtue in place of the inward: they will compliment one another, they will congratulate themselves, upon their conformity to the Divine model, when in reality there may be in them no spark of that celestial fire which kindles itself at the love of God in heaven, and is only worth anything while it is kept alive and refreshed and reanimated by the very grace and glory out of which it sprang. *Take heed that ye do not your alms*—properly, *your righteousness—before men, to*

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be (with a view to being) seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of (with) your Father which is in heaven. Here is religion in its bearing upon the first of those departments of life which were just now enumerated; the life towards one another. A Christian man asks, What effect should the Gospel have upon my life towards others? And the answer is, It should make thee charitable. It should make thee give to him that asketh of thee: it should make thee open-handed in the relief of human want and human woe. But the ignorant Christian wants instruction here, and the half-hearted Christian wants warning. Do not think that all giving is at once charity. There are two kinds of giving. There is the man who gives with a view to the praise of men. When he does his alms, he would like to blow the trumpet, and call attention to his deed. He likes to have it said, That is indeed a charitable man: look at the gold he threw into the plate: look at the distribution made at his door to the poor of his parish: look at the sum he left behind him to found a charity! Our Saviour at once calls that sort of giver a hypocrite. He is acting a part. He is doing one thing and meaning another. He

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professes to be a Christian, and yet his eye is upon the world. In his very religion he is serving self. And the same All-wise Master admits that he may probably gain that which he looks for. He does not say, You will be disappointed: no one will respect you: all men will see through you. No, such men, He says, *have their reward.* And there is a peculiar force (not always perceived) in that word. They *have* it; *have* it *out*, the original language says; have it to the full, and have all they will have. It is a powerful and should be an alarming saying. You set before yourself as your end the approval of men: you shall have it. It was what you looked for, it was what you aimed at: it shall be yours. But in having know that it is your all. The reward of such giving is all here: there is no laying up, no storing away, no safe husbanding, in that sort of almsgiving: what you sought you shall have, and that is a reward all of earth. *Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He thus spake, looked far beyond the age that then was, and left on record a prophecy for the Church of all time. How common, how common now, is this debased,

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this counterfeit coin of a so-called charity! What is the whole system of our religious and benevolent institutions, with their printed lists of donors and subscribers, but a sounding of the trumpet before the almsgiver, that he may have his reward of men? And the need of money for these good uses is so urgent, that we are fain to take it as we can; to make concessions to the spirit of the world, that we may gain at least a material tribute to the cause of good, to the work of God. How doubly do we need, under such circumstances, the application of the convincing and convicting Word, that we may try and examine our own charity of what sort it is, and make sure (if it may be so) that we ourselves are not hypocrites, giving to be seen of men, and therefore having instead of expecting the reward of our deed! Would that the Church were ripe in all places for the application to all purposes, of that best and simplest of all rules of giving; that *on the first day of the week*, on our blessed Christian Sunday, each man should give in God's House *as God hath prospered him;* casting in his offering with a glad heart into Christ's treasury, to be dispensed among the Church's alms, to the support of the sick and needy, to the instruction of the

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ignorant, and the seeking (at home and abroad) of them that are lost!

At all events, let us all give good heed to Christ's voice, as it instructs us with regard to a better and a holier almsgiving. There is a man who so gives his alms as that *the left hand knows not what the right hand doeth.* Instead of summoning others around him to see and record his bounty, it is as if he himself took no count of it. His alms are in secret. So far as the sacred duty permits, of setting an example of Christian bounty, of letting his light shine before men, that they, seeing his good works, may glorify his Father which is in heaven, he does what he does in secret; with no eye, save one alone, upon his giving: *and his Father who seeth in secret shall reward him openly.*

2. Thus far of the life of relative duty; of a Christian man's religion in its working towards other men. It will show itself in doing good; in bountiful giving; in the relief of need, bodily or spiritual, as God shall prosper him. And in this work what he must chiefly guard against will be a spirit of ostentation; that side-look towards the world, which at once vitiates and destroys the Christian offering. Is it only in this first depart-

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ment that the enemy may spoil the life's service? We have seen the counterfeit of charity: is there any such thing as a counterfeit of piety?

So we pass to our second example. The Christian discipleship must affect, above all else, that life which is lived in each of us toward God. The Christian man will be ever a praying man. Instead of keeping God at a distance, it will be his one desire to bring Him near. And this is done by prayer. Prayer is going in quest of God. Prayer is stretching out the hand after God. Prayer is entering into God's presence, and there conversing and communing with the Invisible. It is not so much said, as presupposed, that a Christian man will pray. Just as in the former instance it was assumed that a Christian would give alms, and the only question was, How? even so it is here. *Thou, when thou prayest,* pray thus and not thus. *When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.* Nor are they disappointed. *They have their reward:* they have it, and they have it all. There is nothing left over, to be treasured up for them out of sight in the keeping of a Father in heaven.

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It might have seemed almost impossible that any thought of the world could intrude into this highest act of our being, this communion with the God and Father of all. And yet, when we look closely into human character—most of all, when we carefully observe ourselves—we shall find a constant tendency to the very fault and sin here spoken of. How much of our public worship is due to the wish, in a Christian country, to make a fair show before men! Which of all us would exert himself to worship, if no eye, literally none, but that of God, were cognizant of it? Which of us does exert himself to worship on a week-day, when there is the same God to be sought, and the same wants in us to be carried to His footstool? Surely the world, and the love of the world, has something to do with these distinctions! Surely it is not a mere eagerness for the Divine presence which fills the Churches of our Christendom! there must be something in us of a wish to *seem* to be religious—to be thought duly attentive to the claim of God—or some of us would be worshippers oftener, and some of us would not worship ever.

Let us humbly admit the word into our con-

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sciences, which reminds us of the futility as well as the sinfulness of all such regards. In whatever degree the thought of man mixes itself with our worship, in that same degree is our worship valueless and offensive. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Enter into thy closet. He who thus spake said also, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* There is no discouragement therefore here to social or to public worship. God looks on the spirit: and He can discern, in the crowded Church, that concentration of thought, that intensity of devotion, which is the very essence, the one value, of secluded worship, even as in the privacy of the closet He sees sometimes that vain and wandering imagination which no closing of the doors can exclude, and which is the only real impediment anywhere to His acceptable service.

There are those, also, who have no closet in

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which to hide their heart's devotion; those who, if they pray, must pray in the sight of others; in some crowded room, amidst uproar and scoffing, ridiculed (it may be) or mocked or hindered by foes of their own household. He who seeth in secret, He whose eye is upon the heart, knows all these things, and counts as a closet, with doors shut about it, that shrine of the soul which is kept sacred for Him; that sanctuary of the innermost being, in which the faithful spirit strives to hold communion with Him, however loud earth's interruptions, or however distracting the sights and sounds which jar upon it. Would that a Protestant England might some day imitate in this respect the practice of an unreformed Continent, and leave the doors of its Churches ever open, from earliest dawn till latest midnight, for the devotions of those who have no quiet homes to worship in, and whose souls are athirst for that God who is not the Author of confusion, but the Lover of tranquillity and of peace!

An ostentatious charity, and an ostentatious piety: what remains yet?

3. A third thing, appertaining to the third great element of human life; that in which every one of

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ns must of necessity live to himself. *Moreover, when ye fast.*

It is taken for granted then, as before, that every man, that every Christian, does fast. In other words, that every Christian man, in the management and governance of his own innermost being, does find it necessary to practice some self-denial in reference to things not forbidden nor sinful. We tread here upon dubious ground; a region in which superstition has been busy, and in which men have added, impertinently and injuriously, to God's plain commandment. There has been in the Church a false asceticism, scarcely more in accordance with her Lord's precept than the opposite error of an unbridled licence. Yet the words stand here, on the very forefront of the Gospel, *When ye fast. Thou, when thou fastest.* There must be a sense in which Christian men have to practise the trying virtue of a severe self-discipline. Sometimes in the quality of food, and sometimes in its quantity—sometimes by foregoing an indulgence lawful but not expedient, and sometimes by forcing themselves to an occupation distasteful but salutary —a Christian, it is taken for granted, will assert his self-mastery, and make it a matter of religion to do

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what inclination would shrink from. It is all-important that, while he claims an entire freedom in matters not sinful, he should yet make it evident to each member of his body, and each faculty of his mind, that he, he himself, that central will which is the man, *will not be brought under the power of any.* It is not only, though it be chiefly, in matters of food, that a Christian fasting will find its scope and its exercise. Scarcely less will it be applied to the department of amusement and of society generally; to the vigilant restriction of every enjoyment which threatens to become imperious, and the steady maintenance of every habit particularly repugnant to the freewill of flesh and blood. There are things in which no considerations of strength or health—such as must largely enter into the question of fasting strictly so called—can find place or room. Let him who cannot safely or wisely abstain at stated seasons from his common food deny himself in the choice of it. Let him eat for health, not for pleasure. Let him eat as the master of his own body, not its slave. And let him exercise that mastery in dragging the body, at the call of duty, where it would not go, and in forbidding sometimes its engagement in recrea-

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tions or pastimes in which the self-will would pamper it. These things are of the nature of a Christian fasting, because they are all occasions of settling and of proving the decision between flesh and spirit, between inclination and duty, between sense and Christ.

And to all of these alike the warning voice is applicable, *Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* As in the two former, so in this third and last department of the human being, the danger is ostentation, and the achievement is obscurity. It is the first condition of all Christian virtue that it be a thing between thyself and thy God. The moment thy fasting is observed, that moment it loses its blessing. Seek in all things not the praise of men, but the approval of Him who seeth in secret.

It is needless to dwell in detail upon matters which by their very nature are between God and a man's conscience. One man's fasting would be another man's sin. *Moloch is not the God we serve:* he who enfeebles his frame by wilful aus-

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terities spoils that instrument which is not his own but God's. But a strict temperance injures no man; and an occasional self-denial, practised in the sight of God and as a discipline of religion, has scarcely less the promise of this life than of that which is to come. *Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss.* That end is, for a Christian man, the possession of a body perfectly trained to the behests of the spirit; a life ever mindful of death, a life ever lived in the foreview of eternity.

These, my friends, are common maxims, readily assented to by the understanding of the congregation. But how far have they been, or will they be, acted upon by those who to-day listen? How far will they guide your conduct in the week or in the three weeks before us? How far will they be the principle of a life's progress, and the peaceful retrospect of a life's close?

We know not: God knoweth. Meanwhile this will have been a successful and a happy Sunday, if it has implanted in one heart the solemn and earnest resolution to live henceforth in His sight only who seeth in secret. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a Gospel of sincerity and of sim-

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plicity. The Gospel is a manly system. There is nothing in it of effeminacy, nothing of duplicity, nothing of cowardice. In nothing does it more commend itself to the conscience of mankind, than in its abhorrence of hypocrisy and double dealing, its denunciation of all severance between seeming and being, its noble, its heroic proclamation, as the secret of all virtue and of all happiness, of the one magnificent revelation, *When ye pray, say, Our Father;* and remember that thy Father in heaven is a God which seeth in secret!

Let all hypocrisy and all guile, all self-delusion and deception of others, be banished from among us, as becometh His children. They who cannot elude or deceive that all-searching eye, let them by all means walk in the light! As they would die peacefully, and as they would awake from the dust of death to glory, let them set before themselves one aim, to do the will of God; and let them count no sacrifice costly by which they may attain it! Soon will this stage of human existence be cleared of its actors, and a world of reality and of eternity will have come in. In that day earth's gains and earth's pleasures, the ambitions of this world and the applauses of its children, will for ever have

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gone by into nothingness: he only who hath done the will of God will abide for ever. Be it ours *to obtain that world, and the resurrection of the dead!* Then, whether we have suffered here for a while, or been honoured; whether we have found the lights of earth dim or brilliant; whether we have enjoyed a bright anticipation, or walked through this wilderness by the glimmering ray of a faint hope; will be a matter of small moment in comparison with the question whether at last we were safe; whether death was conquered, and whether heaven was won. The children of this world have their reward. God grant that our treasure be safely stored *where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth!* That it may be so then, be true men now!

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X.

Christ teaches us the Manner of Prayer.

"After this manner therefore pray ye."—Matt. vi. 9.

RAYER is an instinct. The creature in want turns to the Creator. The sinner in fear humbles himself before the Almighty. The spirit which came from and must return to God, reseeks that spring, anticipates that end, of being, and cries out, in the consciousness of capacities unsatisfied and dormant powers, to One from whom strength flows, and in whom all fulness dwells. Prayer is an instinct.

But is not prayer also a mystery? The creature clothed in flesh and blood, in a body of mortality and corruption, kneels upon this material earth and speaks as if to One who seeth in secret. How

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is he to communicate with an invisible Spirit? How does he know that he is in any presence? What guarantee has he for his prayer ever leaving the earth? much more, for its ever entering an ear in heaven?

From this combination of necessity and mystery —this instinctive yearning after an act which is profoundly dark to our reasonings and deep to our ponderings—a third thing arises; that prayer is a great difficulty; that a large part of our gravest anxieties, a large part of the distresses and miseries of our innermost life, is connected with the subject of intercourse with God; that many men give up the attempt altogether, or slur it over as a vague unmeaning form; and that many others stumble, all their life long, over waste pathless wilds within, and go down to the grave unsatisfied as to all that makes comfort or peace or rest for the soul.

It was a matter of course that He who came to us from God with a message of direction and salvation would have something to say to us about prayer. A teacher of religion who left this subject out, would indeed be a blind and impotent and heartless guide. If there be a thing which sinful man wants, it is help in praying. *We know not*

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what to pray for as we ought, is the first experience of nature in the things of God: how certain is it that, if God sends us a messenger of life and salvation, he will soon have this entreaty addressed to him, *Lord, teach us to pray!*

The Sermon on the Mount (the first and most comprehensive of the recorded discourses of Christ) cannot go far without reaching the subject of Prayer.

First, in the way of caution. *When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are;* ostentatious and self-parading; fastening one eye on heaven and the other on earth; praying to God that they may be seen of men. *Thou, when thou prayest*, hide thyself, if thou canst, in thy closet: in secret, with thy door shut behind thee, address thyself, in humble entreaty, to One who seeth in secret.

Again, *When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do.* The heathen man *thinks that he shall be heard for his much speaking.* From morning to evening the idolater will cry, *O Baal, hear me.* In the agony of that profitless wrestling with one who is (as St. Paul says) *nothing in the world*—one who is a nonentity and a lie so far as any hope of help or hearing is concerned—he will

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even lash and lacerate his own body, *cut himself with knives and lancets, till the blood gushes out upon him;* and there is still *neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth.* As ostentation, so also babbling in prayer—a multiplication of words, as though God needed instruction in man's wants; or as though God, reluctant to listen, might be importuned into compliance—is a danger against which the Divine Instructor must guard His disciples, before He turns from the negative to the positive; from the caution, *Be not ye therefore like unto them,* to the direction, *After this manner therefore pray ye.*

There are those, doubtless, in the Christian congregation, who need the caution as well as the direction. Some are superstitious, even now, as to the length and the number and the form of their prayers. Some persons measure or count or minute their prayers instead of weighing them; think nothing done unless a certain round of topics has been punctiliously traversed, and a prescribed length of devotion each day exactly reached. Such persons, in all ages, need the remembrance, *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him,* and looks rather at the desire which

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prompts than at the form which expresses your supplication. One word may have in it the weight of a thousand; and no utterance of the lips can make amends for the silence of the heart.

Not thus, therefore: then how? *After this manner therefore pray ye. When ye pray, say*

Our object at present is not a detailed exposition of the Lord's Prayer, but rather a brief glance at its character as a whole. Let that blessed, that unspeakable gift—so large in its comprehension, so exhaustive in its enumeration, so perfect in its unity, so minute in its application—lie here in view before us as the sum of all prayer; as the prayer taught of God to His creatures: and let us reverently gaze upon it, as at once the pledge of His will to hear, and the guidance of our way to ask! *After this manner pray ye.*

1. And first let your spirit in approaching God be the spirit of a son. *When ye pray, say, Our Father.*

Thus the Prayer is a Gospel. Whatever you are, God is your Father. Your Father by Creation: your Father a second time, when you had fallen and corrupted yourself, by Redemption, in our Lord Jesus Christ. These things are acts of God. You

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cannot help being God's children, you cannot help having God for your Father, on these grounds. You may be an ungrateful, undutiful, insubordinate son; you may have grieved your Father's heart, outraged His love, vexed and gone nigh to quench His Holy Spirit; you may even have taken His goods, whether of nature or grace, and gone to waste them in a far country in riotous living: yet even from thence, even from the land of your estrangement and your exile, if your heart should misgive itself, and your recollection go back to the home of your youth, where all was calm within, and the hired servants themselves had bread enough and to spare; the central figure in that home will not be a stranger to you, not one to be sought for the first time, and bought over to care for you by gifts and offerings of propitiation; your words, even from thence, if they be true words, will still and ever be these, *I will arise* out of this land of my degradation—*I will arise and go to my Father.*

It is in that revelation of a Father that the power of the Gospel lies; and it is in that revelation of a Father that the fount of prayer is opened. You kneel down, reluctant and earth-

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bound, to perform the duty of a creature in acknowledging and worshipping the Creator. It must be done: conscience demands it, and you will go through with it. But the heart is not in it. You are dissatisfied with yourself: the day has been far from sinless: temper has been unmortified, speech has been unbridled, imagination has been sullied, God has not been in all your thoughts. Guilty, and not penitent; with much to confess, but no spirit to confess it; needing much, but not desiring; cold, sullen, silent, unexpecting; what can come of this but an empty and a lifeless and a wretched form of worship? God is displeased with me—I am neither sorrowful nor even fearful—I can neither feel the danger as I ought, nor desire as I ought deliverance out of it. Who does not know by experience the wretchedness I speak of? Whose prayers were not once, if they are not now, predominantly characterized by it?

Now how does our Lord Jesus Christ minister to this condition? He says, Whatever you be, call God your Father. It is true, you have knelt down before Him in a cold and unbecoming state of feeling: there is in you no good thing: your vessel is empty: your clock has run down: you are a

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comfortless, helpless, faithless, hopeless man: the heaven above you is brass, and the earth under you iron. Try this remedy. Say, before aught else, *Our Father.* Say the words, ponder them, dwell upon them. See whether the very utterance be not good for you. Try whether the mere remembrance that He from whom you have wandered, He against whom you have sinned, He whom you are affronting by your indifference and by your impenitence and by your heartlessness, is your own Father, will not, of itself, bring you near; will not, of itself, soften that hardness, and warm that coldness, and quicken that deadness; make you feel that what displeases God must be bad for you; that what God desires must be your good; that you have only to claim, as of His giving, the right and the love of a son, and He will meet you, before you seek Him, with the kiss of forgiveness, with the joy of His home and the ring of His covenant. *When ye pray*—whenever ye pray—*say*, first, and midst, and last, *Our Father.*

2. Again, let your first thoughts in prayer be of Him. He who has first come to God as his Father will go on to remember the things of God, even before he thinks of his own.

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So far as prayer is an instinct, it is an instinct of selfishness. What shall I do? How shall I get deliverance? How shall my sins be forgiven me? It needed a Revelation to turn the instinct of prayer into an acceptable service; to make the sinful and sin-burdened soul say first, *Hallowed be Thy name—Thy kingdom come—Thy will be done*, before one cry for pardon, peace, or grace sought either a personal deliverance or a selfish good.

Very marvellous in its wisdom and in its tenderness is this feature of our Lord's Prayer. The creature, in his lowliness and in his degradation, in his misery and in his sin, must be made to think of God before he thinks of himself. Herein is wisdom. And in doing so—in putting himself after God—in desiring the Divine honour and the Divine dominion more than he desires his own bread or his own forgiveness or his own safety — he will find that he has provided unawares for himself also; that he has learned happiness in learning his place; that he has found the secret of peace in finding the importance of God; that he has discovered that which will raise him above all the storms and buffetings of mortal life, in discovering that it is of more moment that

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God's name be hallowed, that God's kingdom come, that God's will be done, than that he, the creature of a day, should be either flattered into vanity or pampered into selfishness by being made rich or made honourable or made happy. Herein is tenderness. Christ knew what was best for man, when He taught him, if it be possible, to forget himself in God. In proportion as we can do this we shall find that.

There can be no doubt that in every single prayer we shall consult our own real, our own conscious peace, by following strictly our Lord's order; by praying first about God.

Hallowed be Thy name. In other words, May we reverence Thee as we ought to do. May Thy name—which is Thyself, Thou as Thou art, Thou as Christ hath revealed Thee—be everywhere and by all men regarded and remembered and reverenced as that holy thing which it is. May we all worship Thee and reverence Thee as we ought to do.

Thy kingdom come. May that dominion over the heart and life of man, which is Thy right and our happiness, be established at last throughout the whole earth. Meanwhile, may we who

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know the truth also keep and obey it. May we render to Thee that willing homage, of the heart and of the life, which is at once acceptable to Thee, and our reasonable service.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. With us, in us, and by us, may Thy will be done perfectly and done constantly. *As Thy holy Angels alway do Thee service in heaven,* so may we, and all men, obey Thee and submit ourselves to Thee as we ought to do. At last, may there be no enemy; no exception, throughout Thy universe, to the constancy and the willingness and the completeness of Thy service.

Such is one half of the Divine model. When your heart is cold and dead concerning yourself, try, according to your Lord's example, to rouse and to enkindle it concerning God. Pray that the Church may prosper. Pray that your Parish, with its human hearts, its sorrows and its sufferings, its ministrations to young and old, to mind and body, to sickness and sin, may have upon it God's blessing. Pray that there may be an increase of energy in the Church's worship, and of consistency in the Church's life. Carry your thoughts on into a wider field still. Pray that the ways of God may

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be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. Thus expanding your view, thus placing yourself on God's side in the great world-wide warfare, you will return invigorated and enlivened to the business of your individual life, and to the work of your personal devotion.

3. Thus, in the third place, the prayer reaches us, us ourselves. And here it says to us, Let your requests be brief and simple, for the relief of real wants, and in a spirit of entire confidence.

The wants of man, as distinguished from his wishes, are soon told.

(1) He must have bread to eat. The life which God has given must be daily nurtured; and this in all its parts.

Bread, the staff of life, is the symbol of all else that life needs. The very word is significant. It reminds us that there is a difference between necessaries and luxuries. God promises the one to honest labour: if He bestows the other, it is a superadded gift. Men may pray for the necessaries of life, and plead a promise: if they ask for more—if they ask for riches or honours or indulgences—they must do so with a double *if:* if it be Thy will—if it be for my good; else, give not!

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The food of the body is one part of the bread asked for: the food of the mind is another. Thou who hast given me reason, and memory, and judgment, and will, continue to me each, and control, and inform, and guide. Keep alive that which Thou hast imparted. *The life is more than meat.* Thou who hast given the greater, give also the less.

And the food of the soul is the third part of the bread asked for. He who calls Himself *the Bread of Life* must be remembered in His own Prayer. Thou who didst give Jesus Christ to be the life of the world, and didst record for us His own words, *He that eateth me, even he shall live by me*, grant me this day that life-giving and life-sustaining communion with Him; that reception of Him into the soul, in the Person of His Holy Spirit, which is unto strength, and comfort, and peace in believing.

And all this for the day that now is. The morrow is in God's hand. When to-morrow comes, it will then be to-day; and the same calm, undoubting faith will be asking the supply of its wants. So be it. *Sufficient unto the day*, for those who are in the hands of God, is its good alike and its evil.

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(2) The second real want is forgiveness. Sin, though it can neither be touched nor looked upon, is a real thing. Past sin still is. That dark thing which has gone back into its corner —which I would fain leave there, and not disturb nor *rattle up*—yet is, and yet must be. It cannot be undone again, nor unmade. An act is a fact also. The Lord's Prayer calls sin a debt. It is something which must be paid back. The extravagant man, who has obtained on credit goods which he cannot pay for, can he obliterate by a wish or a sigh that embarrassing obligation? No more can the sinner cancel or undo that act or that word by which he has done mischief; by which he has displeased God, and dishonoured or injured man. There is only one thing that can be done now: and the more we feel that sin is a real thing, the better shall we appreciate the reality of that one other thing by which alone sin can be done away. And that is, God's forgiveness. *Forgive us our debts. When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.* That is one of the three real wants: forgiveness; the dismissal of sin; God saying, *For the sake of Jesus Christ I forgive thee all*

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that debt: He is thy peace: go, and sin no more.

But remember — yes, remember it upon thy knees — the forgiven must forgive. *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* Then the relentless malice-bearing man utters an imprecation upon himself every time that he prays. Is there any one in the world whom you forgive not? Then you ask God, upon your bended knees, not to forgive you. *Unforgiving, unforgiven!*

We may draw one strong consolation from the place of this petition in the Lord's Prayer. Certainly our Lord Jesus Christ would not have taught us to ask day by day for forgiveness, if He had not designed to teach us that that forgiveness will come. *Give us our bread, and forgive us our sins.* One with the other. O comfort unspeakable for the sin-laden and the self-accusing! They may ask for pardon as they ask for bread: Christ promises both, when He bids us pray for them together.

(3) There is a third want. We are not to *continue in sin, that grace may abound.* The forgiven must be kept from evil, or the latter end will be

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worse with them than the beginning. *Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.*

God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. The devil, using one of the infirmities or appetites or passions of our fallen nature, first draws us into his snare, and then accuses us. It is not God who tempts. But, when we ask Him not to lead us into temptation, we ask Him not to let us fall into temptation. We ask Him so to order the course of His Providence concerning us, that we may not be brought into such circumstances as would painfully try or utterly shake our constancy and our faithfulness. The prayer, *Lead us not into temptation*, is, in other words, Leave us not to fall into it: keep us from it. O Thou who canst do all things, save us, we pray Thee, from the agony of that trial or the misery of that defeat.

At all events, *deliver us from evil:* from the three evils, as our Church enumerates them; *all sin and wickedness; our spiritual enemy*, his crafts and assaults; *and everlasting death.* These three things are all evil: against these three evils we

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may pray without an *if*. It *must* be bad for us to fall into sin: it *must* be bad for us to have the tempter near us: it *must* be bad for us to be cast into hell. And He who bade us pray against these things promised us also deliverance.

4. Finally, the Lord's Prayer says to us, Let your spirit in approaching God be evermore a spirit of unselfishness. The word *I* is not found in it. *Our Father—our daily bread—our debts—forgive us—lead us—deliver us*—it is the prayer throughout of a society, of a community, of a family: and if any one ever uses it in solitude, still he must not be selfish in it; he must remember others; his word must be still *We*, not *I*.

This is not the manner of man. Not least, perhaps most of all, in prayer does our selfishness show itself. What else can I think of but my own wants, my own miseries, my own sins? It is true, we must think of them. But still not for nothing, not assuredly by accident, did our Lord Jesus Christ teach us in His Prayer to mingle ourselves, even in our solitude, with the household of the Church and with the family of man. Even as in thinking of God we best of all con-

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sider ourselves; finding in the elevation of that thought a benefit not to be gained by grovelling amongst the petty cares and selfish wants of our own isolated being; so also it is in thinking of one another that we most effectually remember ourselves: in the expansiveness of that thought we find a blessing denied to a self-centred and self-contained piety: the recorded experience of one Christian man has probably been the experience of all—that, when he could not pray for himself, when his heart was locked up and silent, and the grace of personal supplication withheld, yet, if he resorted to intercession, if he approached the mercy-seat for a friend or a sister, if he asked for another those blessings which for the moment he could not ask for himself, that unselfish prayer seemed to open the floodgates of worship, and he who came to supplicate for another *went down to his house* answered for himself. He who knew what was in man acted doubtless in all wisdom upon that Divine intuition when He bade the individual man to say in his prayers, Our *Father—give* us our *bread—forgive* us our *debts—and deliver* us *from evil.*

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The subject of Prayer, which has now occupied us in connexion with its Divine sample and model, is a subject at once of exhortation and of reproof.

To be allowed to pray—to be commanded to pray—to be taught to pray; in other words, to be assured that God will listen to us, that we have but to call upon Him from the heart, and He will hear the sound and answer it; this surely should be enough! How great, how wonderful the dignity thus bestowed! that we should be in present communication, in personal contact, with *the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity!* Alas that the privilege should need to be pressed upon us as a duty! Alas that even among Christian people not one in ten should be certainly and evidently a praying man! Let us look back, every one, upon the day or the week or the year that is gone, and consider with ourselves what has been its secret history in this one aspect. What converse have we held with our Father which is in heaven? How far have we manifested that first sign and evidence of a Christian, that he is one who *calls upon God*—one who *calls God in*—

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appeals to Him in all his difficulties, and looks up to Him in all his trials?

Let us not be strangers to Him, with whom, if we be *counted worthy to obtain that world*, we must spend an eternal age. Christ our Saviour has taught us to pray: *let us lift up our hearts, with our hands, to God in the heavens.*

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XI.

Of the Candle of the Soul, which is a Single Intention.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"—Matt. vi. 22, 23.

HREE Christian duties have been brought into view in this section of the Divine Sermon: Almsgiving, Prayer, Fasting.

With respect to each one, the first caution is, Beware of doing it with a view to the applause of men. Otherwise you will *have* your reward; have it, the original word says, and have it *out*. This caution is applicable to all the three.

With respect to one of them, the most elementary and the most vital, a second caution is

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added. In prayer there must not only be no ostentation, but also no *vain repetitions*, no *much speaking*, as though God needed to be instructed in human want, or else importuned into its relief.

An express rule of Prayer is added. *After this manner therefore pray ye.* This was our last subject.

Prayer was the second of the three duties. Fasting follows it. This topic was taken in connexion with the two former, and in reference to the caution applied to all the three.

The subject of Fasting is ever connected in Scripture with that of Almsgiving. It is not intended that a man should save by fasting; that his expenditure should be on the whole diminished by his personal self-denial. This would be to introduce into such self-denial a motive the very opposite of Christian. The Prophet Isaiah teaches a different lesson. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?*

It is thus that the 19th verse is linked to the 18th.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,

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where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

None can question the primary application of this passage to the duty of Almsgiving. It is so employed by our Church, when it is made one of the Sentences to be read during the Offertory, for the purpose of enforcing upon the Congregation the duty and the blessedness of Christian bounty.

A man may, if he will, hoard his treasure. He may lay his money by: he may seek good security for it: he may invest it with large advantage: he may treat it as all his own, and think only how to ensure its possession to himself and to his children. He can do so. If he does, he is a man laying up his treasure upon earth. He breaks no law in so doing. If he chooses that alternative, neither God nor man will interpose to prevent him. Christ says not one word against the lawfulness of such a decision. As ever, He places both sides of the case before us, and leaves us to judge.

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A man may save largely if he will. He takes that course with its risks. In those days and in those regions such property consisted chiefly in metal and in raiment. *Talents of silver* and *changes of garments* were the form in which wealth was hoarded or bounty dispensed. Each had its risk. *Your riches are corrupted*, St. James writes, *and your garments are moth-eaten. Moth and rust corrupt*, our Lord says, *and thieves break through and steal.* In these days the forms of wealth, and therefore the risks of wealth, are varied and multiplied; and he who would now express in parallel terms the precariousness of all selfish hoarding, would draw his illustrations not from moth or rust, scarcely from the thief or the burglar, but rather from the breaking of a bank or the bursting of a reservoir, the failure of a speculation or the fraud of a trustee. A man may, if he will, lay up his treasure below: but he does this at very great risks, and if he loses earth he loses heaven also.

On the other hand, a man may, if he will, dispense his treasures. He may *disperse abroad, and give to the poor.* He may have an open heart for sorrow, and an open hand for want.

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Men may marvel at his prodigality: they may infer from it what they will—boundless wealth, reckless improvidence, neglect of his own: still, if he gives from principle—out of love to others because God in Christ has first loved him—our Lord here says that that man is not losing, not squandering, not dissipating, but laying up: his treasure is growing all the time: and with this difference from the other, that he is laying up where there is no rust, no moth, no thief; laying up in heaven, where the Almighty and the All-true is at once pledged to keep and pledged to repay.

Will any one presume to call this a self-righteous doctrine? If so, he must tear out many a leaf of his Bible, and deny Him from whom he learns his Gospel. The duty of giving, and the blessedness of giving, is one of the first lessons of the Divine Gospel, and, alas! one of the latest beliefs and latest obediences of the Christian.

Christ ever deals frankly with the conscience and with the heart of man. If He ever utters a hard saying, He does it with simplicity, and He leaves it not without a reason. It is so here.

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A man's heart can be but in one place. It cannot be, as we would fain have it, both on earth and in heaven. To much which follows this is the key. Each man is one, not two. There is a unity in the human character, which God sees there already. God could judge any one of us at this moment, without ambiguity and without witnesses. He sees, no doubt, in each one of us a unity of purpose and a unity of will. The man's heart is where his treasure is; and a man's treasure must be either here or there—either on earth or in heaven—the treasure of his substance, the treasure of his thoughts, the treasure of his affections, the treasure of his interests. God sees, concerning each one of us, whether we are more bent upon saving money or upon saving the soul; upon gaining and enjoying and keeping the things that are seen, or upon securing and retaining and at last entering upon *the inheritance of the saints in light.* A large and a grave topic for self-examination, self-conviction, and self-correction in righteousness!

It is out of this thought of the unity, the singleness, of the real man in God's sight, that the words of the text flow.

The light of the body is the eye.

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It is a Parable. Let us look first at the symbol, and then at the signification.

The word here rendered *light* is elsewhere (and more correctly) given as *a lamp* or *candle.* It is the same expression which we found in the 5th chapter: *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel.* It is the same word which we read in the 12th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel: *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning.* It is the term by which the Baptist is designated in the 5th chapter of St. John: *He was a burning and a shining light* (*the lamp which burns and gives light*), in contradistinction to the other term, applied to our Saviour alone, *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh* (*by coming*) *into the world.* Just so St. Peter speaks, in his 2nd Epistle, of inspired Prophecy as *a light* (*lamp*) *shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.* The ministry of John, the last and greatest of the Prophets, like that of his fellow-servants before him, was the lamp that illuminated the darkness of the dim murky chamber of this world, until the day dawned, and *the Sun of righteousness rose* upon mankind *with healing in His wings.*

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The lamp of the body, the candle of the body—its derived and kindled light, not its original and central sun—*is the eye.* It is that which prepares, which admits, which applies to the guidance of the body, the great universal light, of which God has set the source and spring on high, in the firmament of the heaven. The eye is that which the body sees by: it is the instrument, the medium, of that sight, upon which the body, and scarcely less the mind, depends for information, direction, and guidance. How true, how exact, are the figures of Holy Scripture!

The candle of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. Depending, as each man does, upon the eye for sight, all must turn upon the condition of the eye. If that be single; if there be no film upon it; no cloud of disease, and no obstacle of intervening matter; the light of day and of the sun will pass freely in, revealing alike the objects which surround, the work which must be done, and the way which must be trodden. If, on the other hand, the eye be evil; imperfect in structure, diseased in condition, or impeded and

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obstructed in the directness of its vision; instantly the inner scene is confusion and darkness: the work is spoilt under the hand, and the feet totter along the straight path of travel: yea, the strong words of the Lawgiver and the Patriarch are literally verified, *Thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness—They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night.*

If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness; if that which should be thy guide has become thy deceiver, and the very light which enters, enters with confused images and distorted signs; *how great is that darkness!* Far worse in its effects than the absence of light, because it professes to give instruction, and communicates error; encourages thee to work, and destroys that work in the doing.

Such is the effect, in the body, of a diseased eye.

And when we have read one verse more, and so taken into view the context before and after, the interpretation of the Parable will be as clear as its symbols. Before it, *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also:* either on earth or in

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heaven, not both. After it, *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* Either heaven or earth—either God or the world—one, not both, will be the place of your treasure; one, not both, will be the Lord of your service.

So then the key to the text itself will be the saying, *If thine eye be single.* The eye must present one object at a time, and present that one object single: the doubling of the object is at once a mark of disease.

And thus the whole chapter falls into harmony with itself.

When thou doest alms, think of God only: think not what man will say; think of God only. When thou prayest, pray not to be seen of men: enter into thy closet, shut thy door, and address thyself to Him only who seeth in secret. When thou fastest, appear not unto men to fast: look only to Him who loves the sincere heart and the single aim. In all things think of heaven, not of earth. There lay up thy treasure: there then will thy heart be. Let the object which the eye of

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the soul presents to thee be single, not double. When the vision of the bodily eye is double, men instantly infer disease: so is it with the soul. To have two objects in view at once—two aims, two regards, two ruling purposes—is as impossible, when God judges, as to have two masters; to hire yourself at once to two employers; to undertake to give your time and your strength and your allegiance at the same moment to two householders or two landowners. It is an impossibility, a contradiction in terms. *No man can* do it.

The subject thus brought to us is one of the gravest that can occupy the heart of man.

The candle of the body is the eye. Upon the condition of the eye therefore depends the safety, the efficiency, the well-being of the body. If the eye be single, the body can move securely among surrounding obstacles, can use the hand skilfully upon the materials of labour, can choose the evil and refuse the good, by an accurate appreciation of things that differ. If the eye be diseased, all is confusion, all is disappointment, all is mistake, error, and ruin. *The candle of the body is the eye.*

And the candle of the soul? We presume not

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to say which of the constituent parts of man's spiritual being is the precise thing which we are to understand under this figure. In one aspect—severing the passage from its context—we should certainly say, *Conscience.* We should speak of that faculty which points out in every man right and wrong; which says to him, *This is the way, walk thou in it:* that is not the will of God, and therefore it can lead thee only to unhappiness and ruin. But, looking at the passage as a whole, we shall find it preferable to say, *The eye of the soul is the Intention:* if that be single, if that be upright and good, even such will thy conduct be: if that be evil, if that be double, if that be vacillating and two-faced, then will thy life be darkness and thine end sorrow.

Now at first sight we might imagine that in all of us the intention is good. It is the common thing to say, *I have my faults; but I mean well.* We speak of a well-disposed, well-meaning, well-intentioned man, as if this were compatible not only with many failings, but with a totally irreligious and unchristian life. We must learn of Christ that this is not, for ourselves at least, true language. We must impress upon ourselves, from

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these serious words of our Lord, the possibility that there may be in us a fundamental want, and that that want may lie in the very point of which we are so confident—in the absence within us of a right intention.

1. Some of us are living from day to day *without an intention.* The eye of the mind is fixed definitely upon nothing. We take the day as it comes, get out of it what it gives of pleasure, do in it what it forces upon us of duty. But if we were asked at its close, What has been your object to-day? we could give no answer. The question itself would surprise us. Still more, if the enquirer should go on to say, Have you been laying up treasure to-day on earth, or in heaven? Have you to-day been serving God, or serving the world? Was your eye fixed solely and steadily on the will and on the command and on the honour of One who is invisible, and who searcheth the very secrets of the heart? or was it your aim—so far as you were conscious of any aim—to give satisfaction to those around you; to think and speak and act as they would expect and as they would approve? Such questions would strike many of us as fantastical or morbid. We should

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say, You have no right to sift and to scrutinize motives in this manner. If I live decently, and do my work, and pay my way, I do all that can be expected of me. God will never condemn me for not having brought my motives to the bar of judgment: *He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.* So we live: taking each day as it comes: doing in it a little better or a little worse, according as health or temper or chance may guide; but never setting ourselves to decide that which, if our Lord Jesus Christ speaks truly, must be the great question of all, Whom am I serving? self, or Christ? the world, or God? On what object is the eye of the soul, which is the intention, really, steadily, predominantly fixed? time or eternity, this world or that world, earth or heaven? We live without an intention. And having lived so, what shall the end be? What confusion, what uncertainty, what groping in the dark, is the close, the death-bed, of this intentionless life! What a looking this way and that for a hope which comes not, and for a faith which will not be grasped! What a sunset, amidst banks of threatening clouds, of a day bright perhaps in its dawning, and prosperous, outwardly at least, in its advance!

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2. Such is the man without an intention. I know not whether we should be justified in making any very wide separation between his case and the next; that of the man *with two intentions*. And yet there is a difference. For we reach now a definite, a marked feature in the character and life of man. We speak of one who has heard and has listened to the Gospel; one who believes the revelation of a call from heaven, a judgment to come, and an everlasting life; one who sees that there is a meaning in the life that is, and an issue of it in the life beyond. He has heard the Word, perhaps with joy, perhaps with trembling: he has felt his sins, he has prayed for forgiveness, he has formed Christian habits, he has come regularly to the house of God, he has knelt humbly and assiduously at Christ's table. It is his wish to be saved. It is his profession—and in many things he acts upon it—to be a Christian, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. He has an intention to live aright, and to die in peace. It is well. But not on this account can we withhold from him the discriminating question of the text. Is this his only intention? Is the service of God,

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is the attainment of heaven, his one object, or one of two? Amongst Christian people there is a deep infection oftentimes of worldliness: they will serve God, but then God must not forbid some things: a few matters must be left to them, in which they may look off from God and glance at the opinion of men: they will *do many things*, but they will not do all things: they will forego some things; but a few, very profitable or very pleasant, they must be allowed to retain: they will make sure of heaven, but they must keep well also with the world. Now this is that sort of doubleness of vision of which our Lord Jesus Christ seems to give warning here. It is not that God is a hard Master, crushing altogether the joys of earth for those who will not miss heaven. Godliness, St. Paul says, has a promise here as well as there: but the point still is, the intention. Which do you look at—God's will, or your own? the command of Christ, or the custom of men? Are you willing to do all that God desires, or only some things? Are you willing to give up everything which God disapproves, or only that which you can part with and not feel it? The man without an intention

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is not a happy man: but more miserable still, in life and in death, is the man with two intentions — the man who tries to serve two masters, and to win two worlds.

3. Finally, there are men of *one and but one intention:* men whose whole soul is bent and set upon one thing only; the will of God, the command of God, the blessing of God, the love of God. The eye is single, and the whole body therefore is full of light. O how easy, by comparison, is their course! How many ambiguities clear themselves, how many stumblingblocks roll themselves aside, how many a *great mountain becomes a plain before them*, by reason of the singleness and the simplicity of their aims! If man approves, let him approve: but at least I will do the will of God. If this scheme, or that, of my natural inclination succeed or be frustrated, at least I will *work out my salvation with fear and trembling.* I serve One who will deny me nothing which He in His infinite wisdom sees to be for my good. *What else I want, or think I do, 'Tis better still to want.* When the eye is single, when the intention is clear and resolute, all is light within. While others

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are enquiring, How can I do this wickedness, and yet not displease God? how can I keep my Christian character, and yet make this compromise or compass that doubtful gain? he sees no perplexity, because he desires only to do right: he scarcely feels the sacrifice, because he has within him that warming, cheering, invigorating light, which will *shine*, he knows, *more and more unto the perfect day.* And so, when death approaches, instead of beginning then to ask, *What must I do to be saved?* instead of looking this way and that, as though to find a hope which can survive death, and form an anchor for the storm-tossed soul amidst the agonies of expiring nature; he lies down on the bed of death, as though to sleep and to rise again; because he *knows* already *whom he has believed, and is persuaded that He is able to keep that which he has* long ago *committed unto Him against the great day. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.*

God give us all grace to cleanse ourselves betimes from that doubleness of the spiritual vision, which is confusion in life, and darkness

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in death! *If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.* And *if thy whole body*, St. Luke adds, *be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.*

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XII.

CHRIST TEACHES US WHAT WE OUGHT TO SEEK. TWO THINGS.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."—Matt. vi. 33.

A SINGLE intention—an eye clear and transparent — a body full of light, because the organ of vision is sound and healthy—is the general topic of this chapter. In almsgiving, in prayer, in fasting; in every act of worship and in every particular of religion; this will be the first, the vital question, Is the mind sincere? is the purpose honest? is the aim direct, truthful, earnest? If not, all is lost. The reward of such acts is the reward which the lower motive sought; the praise of men, not the praise of God; the honour which

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is of the earth, not that of eternity or of heaven.

It is so in all things. No man's real treasure is in two places. On earth, or in heaven—not both. And where the treasure is, the heart is. The heart cannot be in two places. On earth, or in heaven—not both. And where the heart is, there only will be the reality of service. *No man can serve two masters:* no man can be listening at the same moment for two words of command, for two voices of authority: they may prescribe opposite, contrary, conflicting duties: even consistent duties cannot be done two at once. God, or mammon—God, or the world—God, or self—not both. It is impossible.

But some man may say, I am not a covetous man, I am not an ambitious man, I am no seeker of inordinate riches or of intoxicating honour. I am a plain man, working for a maintenance, working for my family, contented with a competence, satisfied if I have bread to eat and raiment to put on. To speak of me as *serving mammon* would be an exaggeration, would be an abuse of terms. Now it is just here that the text and its context come in.

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You may have no ambition beyond the humblest; no covetousness beyond the most legitimate: and yet you may be a man of double aim and (so far as it is possible) of divided service. Anxiety may be to you what ambition or avarice is to another. The two classes of evil, different as they may seem in their development, have one root and one spring. And because I have said, *Ye cannot serve God and mammon, therefore I say, Take no thought for your life.*

Take no thought sounds like, *Make no provision;* and this last Christ, the All-wise and the All-merciful, does not say. It should rather be rendered, *Be not anxious for your life.* It is the same word by which the busy restlessness of an over-carefulness was reproved in the home of Bethany: *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.* Or the too eager anxiety of married life, in the words written by St. Paul to the Corinthians: *She that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.* Or the feverish fretfulness of an unbelieving agitation, in the warning of the same Apostle to the Philippian Church: *Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and sup-*

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plication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. Even thus it is here, in that passage which is the source and spring of all such Apostolical doctrine: *Therefore I say unto you, Be not careful (be not anxious) for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.*

Be not anxious. The word is more significant and more appropriate still. It is the very word for the place: is it not so with all Christ's words? He has been urging to unity; unity within. Let the whole man be one. Let him have one aim, not two; one sight, not two; one treasure, by will and choice, even as he certainly will have but one in result and in God's judgment. And then follows, *Take no thought:* and the word itself is derived from one which signifies partition, division, distraction. *Be not anxious* is, in the Greek, *Be not divided. Cares*, said the classical apophthegm, *draw the mind two ways.* Is not anxiety just that? Anxiety is distraction: a mind going two ways: a mind hovering and wavering between two alternatives; two alternatives of hope and fear; and, alas! too often, two alternatives also of right or of wrong-doing. Could we better

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describe that condition against which our Lord here warns us? And does not the very description tell us that the warning is just? Care is division, and division is at once a misery and a snare.

Hear our Lord's strong and impressive reasons for fighting against this anxiety.

(1) *Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* The possession of life, the possession of the body, is a greater thing than the support of the one or the clothing of the other; greater in its value, greater also in its difficulty: yet God has given it you—has given life, has given the body. Can you not trust Him who has done the greater to do the less? Can you not trust Him who has communicated life, who has wrought and endowed this bodily frame with all its marvellous capacities of enjoyment and action, to support the one and to clothe the other? He who has done the greater will do the less.

(2) *Behold the fowls of the air:* they make no provision, like you, for the supply of their wants: *they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.*

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Are ye not much better than they? And again, after the interruption of one verse, *Why take ye thought (why are ye anxious) about raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow:* they make no provision, like you, for the supply of their wants: *they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* No hot-house of art can emulate the garden of nature: no royal robes, fabricated by cost and man's device, can compete for one moment with the texture or with the colouring of the tiniest or the commonest of God's flowers: then, *if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven;* that flower which, mingled with the herbage of Sharon, is withered amongst it by one day's storm-blast, and swept along with it into the oven which is to be heated for the preparation of man's food; if God count this poor, perishable, short-lived flower worth a care and a culture such as no art can rival and no cost purchase; *shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* He who gave the greater, it was before argued, will surely give the less: He who gave the life will support, and

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He who framed the body will much more clothe. Now it is added, He who cares for the less will care much more for the greater: He who provides the careless thoughtless bird with its food, and clothes the senseless dying flower with its beauty, will much more bless your honest toil with bread for the eater, and reward your patient skill with raiment for the wearer. He who gave the greater will much more give the less: and He who cares for the less will much more care for the greater.

(3) *Which of you by taking thought* (*by being anxious*) *can add one cubit unto his stature?* St. Luke adds, *If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?* Some have understood the question with reference rather to age than to stature. *Which of you*, by any anxiety, *can add one cubit to his lifetime?* to that of which the Psalmist speaks when he says, *Behold, Thou hast made my days as it were a span long;* or, as it stands in the Bible Version, *Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee.* Which of you can lengthen by one cubit the destined extent of your mortal being? Either interpreta-

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tion has its force: the commoner will satisfy us. No amount of anxiety will raise a man one inch above the stature which nature has assigned him. And if you cannot do so small a thing as this; if no will of yours, and no effort of yours, and no care or study of yours, can alter by one hair's breadth your bodily height and stature; surely this should convince you that you are in the hands of a Power above your own, and reconcile you to the duty of a passive and a trustful submission. Anxiety is useless.

(4) *After all these things*—these things of time and sense—*do the Gentiles seek.* To spend thought and care upon the support of life or the clothing of the body, is to sink to the level of a heathen: he minds earthly things, because he knows not the things divine and heavenly. *Be not ye therefore like unto them.* Rise to the measure of your Christian privilege, as men redeemed and rescued from the grovelling worldlinesses of a fallen nature.

(5) *Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.* That anxiety, which is thus useless, because it can effect nothing; and thus unworthy, because it is inconsistent with your position as children of grace; is also, in the last

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place, needless: it is superseded by a knowledge and by a love as perfect in its insight as it is infinite in its good-will. It is not that you are to affect, as Christians, a sublime indifference to the wants of this life. You are not to say, Heaven is all, and therefore this life is nothing. Such professions of contempt for the body are seldom true; and if ever they are real, they are no part of Christ's teaching. He does not say, Think how short life is, and how little it can concern you whether that short life is spent in comfort or in suffering. Christ never holds an unreal language; and therefore He never speaks of the life that is, as either insignificant or indifferent. His tone is quite opposite. Life does need, He says, certain supports and certain appliances; few indeed and simple, yet constant and adequate: life needs these things, and God, your heavenly Father, knows it. Anxiety is not useless only, because it cannot get and cannot do what it would: it is needless also, for this reason, that your Father knows your wants—knows, recognizes, and will supply.

From the negative, the reproof of anxiety, the discourse turns to the positive, the proper object

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of man's quest and search. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Man will have a treasure; and He who warns him against laying it up here, teaches him how to lay it up there. Even so, man will seek something: any man, who is worthy of the name, has an object, has an aim, has an interest and a pursuit. A man who lives only by chance—dreaming, drifting, sauntering through life, without a purpose and without an aim—is destitute of the first attribute, the first characteristic of man, that he *looks before and after.* And it was the work of Christ in His Gospel to use this attribute, to work from and to work by this characteristic: not to bid us cease to plan, or cease to strive, or cease to labour, but only to set before ourselves a worthy object; not to mistake a false light for the true, but to *distinguish things that differ*, and *so to run that we may obtain.*

Just so it is here. Be not anxious, be not careful and careworn, about the things of this life. Trust God more. He gave you that being which requires sustenance. He sustains other beings less valuable by nature than the rational. No

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anxiety will gain your ends. Anxiety is unworthy of you as God's redeemed. Anxiety is needless, because God knows your wants, and because He who knows is also your Father. But what then? Am I to have no object in life? Am I to aim at a passive drowsy condition, caring for nothing, desiring nothing, seeking and striving after nothing? Not so. I set before you that which is worth seeking; that to which no amount of seeking is disproportionate; *the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.*

1. *The kingdom of God.* That for which we pray, as often as we say in the Lord's Prayer, *Thy kingdom come.* That of which Jesus Christ, and His immediate forerunner, brought the first tidings, in the words, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand.* That of which Jesus Christ sought to give some intelligible particulars, as to its present beginning and its future manifestation, when He began many of His Parables with the same simple introduction, *The kingdom of heaven is likened unto* this thing in nature, or that thing in human life: *Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?*

To *seek* this kingdom must be to endeavour to

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find a place in it. How magnificent a view is thus opened! Instead of being careful and troubled about the support or the clothing (necessary though they be) of the perishable body, we are to be always endeavouring to find a place in that kingdom of God, of which the beginning is now, but of which the consummation will be an eternity of blessedness.

Thus then this seeking has two objects—closely connected, but separable at least in thought—an object afar off, and an object near at hand.

(1) Seek to have a place in God's kingdom *when it comes.* We all wish to go to heaven. When a friend dies, we hope that he is in heaven. So long as any vestige of Christian belief lingers in or amongst us, it will probably be the desire of all of us to find a place in heaven. Our idea of heaven may be vague, our notion of the way yet more indistinct: but at least, whatever it is, and wherever, we do wish to go there. And it is a good wish. Only remember that some persons have wished it, of whom we dare not hope that the wish was realized: as when Balaam said, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* And remember too that our Lord speaks

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not here of wishing, but says, in a very strong figure, *Seek ye*, and *seek ye first, the kingdom of God.* You all know what seeking is. When you have lost a precious ring, or a piece of gold, or a paper which was worth money or which was your title to a purchased possession, we all know what seeking is then. Or when we have set our hearts upon some office of dignity or emolument, something which comes not without solicitation, what zeal will a man show in canvassing for himself or for his friend! how little will he grudge in that service lengthened days and nights shortened! what will he not do, what will he not suffer, if success may but at last crown his efforts?

Now it is a figure of this kind which our Lord here uses in reference to our pursuit of heaven. Seek ye, and seek ye first, the kingdom of God. Search for it, as you would for a lost treasure: solicit it, as you would an office of emolument or a place of trust.

It is well for us, now and then, to stand still, and question with ourselves how much account we make of the promise of heaven; what exertion we use, what toil and what self-denial, for the sake of securing salvation; yes, to speak plainly,

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what time we give to it, and what thought; what things we actually do, and really forbear from, simply because we would not miss heaven, because we would *be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead.*

(2) Scarcely less urgent — nay, just equally urgent—is the other question as to our seeking the kingdom of God; that is, as to our pursuit of a real and living place in it in the time that is.

If the Bible be true, God is already reigning. Already there is a true spiritual power, exercised by God Himself, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, over and in the hearts of men. When you see a Christian person, one who is evidently living by faith, one who manifestly speaks and acts under the influence of a present fear and a present love of God, as revealed in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, you see a subject, a true living subject, of the kingdom of God. That person is what he is by virtue of a rule exercised in his heart by the holy and life-giving Spirit of God. That person has sought therefore, and is seeking still, a present place in God's kingdom; in that kingdom which (St. Paul says) is *righteousness*

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and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is a solemn thing to be brought so near to God as even to see a subject of His kingdom. It should remind us how near He is, in His highest and holiest influences, to every one of us. It should arouse us to seek more earnestly a living place in that kingdom, which the worldly man would postpone into some fanciful, some imaginary future, but which the Christian delights to believe in as already established, already accessible, though not yet come.

2. And the thought of the present kingdom brings us naturally to the second part of the charge; that we seek first, not only God's kingdom, but also God's righteousness.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, said one of the opening benedictions. And now again, among the precepts, *Seek ye first God's righteousness.*

No one can be satisfied to regard this as a mere command to seek forgiveness or justification. It is evidently the pursuit of God's righteousness as something which is to be communicated to us—something in which we are to resemble and to be made like Him—which is spoken of in the beatitude of the fifth chapter, and here again in the

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precept of the sixth. *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.* To seek first God's righteousness is to seek (in the sense already explained) to be righteous even as God is righteous.

How faint, how poor, is all the seeking, which we have yet known, of this high attainment! A few feeble, superficial, wandering words of prayer at early morning; a few general and half-unmeaning petitions for grace and strength: then a day filled up with cares and interests and duties of this life; a foolish word here, and a vain thought there; a duty or two left undone, and a duty or two done languidly, heartlessly, and as of course: a day of business all earthly, and an evening of relaxation all earthly too: then a hasty, perfunctory, drowsy prayer at night, asking a general forgiveness for sins so little regarded in the commission as not even to be noticed in the confession: is not this the spiritual life (if it may be called so) of many? Do we libel the Congregations of this country—do we disparage the Church of this time—if we say that this is all that most men know of a seeking after God's righteousness? that few, by comparison,

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either dread sin beforehand, or struggle with sin at the time, or are unhappy about sin afterwards? that few, by comparison, have had experience either of a conflict, as for life or death, with indwelling evil, or of a decisive victory, were it but now and then, over a strong, a subtle, or an attractive temptation? *Seek ye first God's righteousness*—seek, in other words, to be what God is, in His love of holiness, in His abhorrence of evil; seek to be like God in His purity, like God in His patience, like God in His disinterestedness, like God in His love—is indeed a command *far above out of our sight*, a command to which we practically listen not, a command which we never set ourselves seriously to obey.

It is to the followers of Christ, in this His will, that the promise is vouchsafed, *And all these things shall be added unto you.* They who seek first God's kingdom and righteousness shall receive, as it were, unsought, all things needful for the life that is. The way to have (in these things) is not through anxiety, but through trust. As a general rule, he who sets himself to reach heaven, he who sets himself to pursue God's righteousness, is the man whose earthly store prospers, the man

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who is never *seen forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

Has then the righteous man never wanted? As a rule, by comparison with others, we would boldly answer, No. As a rule, God's outward blessing goes with the inward; and he who by patient industry, apart from care and doubting, has calmly sought of God his daily bread, has, we believe—for we think Christ says so—found it. And while we thus broadly state and rely upon the Divine promise, we may say also, with a wise writer, that *for extraordinary cases there are extraordinary consolations;* that, if God does ever suffer His servant to want bread, it is for the sake of some higher blessing in that which He more values; in that immortal, imperishable soul, of which Christ is the bread, Christ the stay, and Christ the exceeding great reward.

Take therefore no thought—be not ye anxious—are the concluding words for all—*for the morrow*, for the day that shall be: *the morrow shall take thought* (*shall be anxious*) *for the things of itself.* Leave for to-morrow to-morrow's anxieties: then it will be to-day: then will Christ's precept enter into it, with Christ's promise, and the anxiety post-

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poned shall be an anxiety prevented. At all events, *sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

This has been a plain and a common subject: but no subject surely could be more suitable to a Congregation of the Fallen. Anxiety is the bane, the misery, and the curse, of sin. Anxiety came in with the Fall, and goes not out save with the Redemption. The redemption of the soul calms it: the redemption of the body shall destroy it. Even for the Christian there is an anxiety in this life; an anxiety real and legitimate, an anxiety which the Gospel itself rather regulates than precludes. St. Paul himself felt it, when he said, *Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* St. Paul himself bade us all feel it, when he said, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;* and St. Peter, *If ye call on the Father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

This Christian anxiety, in proportion as it is felt, will cast out the other. It is impossible for one, into whose soul the realities of eternity and *the powers of the world to come* have entered, to be taking anxious thought for such questions as these, *What shall I eat? or what*

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shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be clothed? His heavenly Father must see to that: he can but go and seek the kingdom.

Let us hear the word, and also do it. These things are written, these things are again and again spoken in our ears, that they may quicken in us a godly fear, and help us forward in the way of eternal life. If true, they are also urgent: for *the word which Christ hath spoken, the same shall judge us at the last day.*

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XIII.

CHRIST WARNS US AGAINST JUDGING.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."—Matt. vii. 1.

ITH these words begins the third and last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. We have read the characteristics of the blessed; the office and responsibility of Christians towards the earth and the world; the spiritual nature of that new Law which is come to replace the Law of Sinai and of the Jew. In full accordance with this high and holy standard of duty, we have been warned against ostentation and self-parade in the exercise of what are called religious acts—such as almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. We have been taught the proper subjects, and the indispensable conditions, of acceptable worship. We have been reminded of the necessity of a simple, a sincere, a

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single aim; of that direct and clear vision, of conscience, and of the spirit, which is in the soul what the eye is to the body—at once the condition of health and the safeguard of action. A man must know whom he serves; and there is no such thing, either in the natural life or the spiritual, as a service really divided between two masters. Not only ye ought not—*ye cannot serve God and mammon.* Take then your choice. Be God's wholly and singly; and let neither covetousness on the one hand, nor mistrustful anxiety on the other, distract your attention or divide your service. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

But while you are thus strict, even to severity, in your inspection and in your judgment of yourselves —thus fearful of all compromise, and all double-dealing, and all half-service within — you must beware of setting yourselves up as discerners of spirits, or as judges one of another.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy

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brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

We have to ask what is here forbidden, and why?

1. It is plain that the thing forbidden is not the office, or the upright discharge of the office, of a Magistrate or a Judge.

When provision is made, in a Christian town or in a Christian state, for the punishment (in due course of law) of offenders against the tranquillity of our streets or the security of our homes; when the periodical solemnities of an assize bring face to face before the people the calm majesty of justice and the troubled impotence of crime—reminding the gazing throng (with their will or against it) of a more august tribunal and a more searching inquisition still—in all this there is nothing contrary to the will or to the precept of Christ. He was Himself a respecter of civil order, and of the authority

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by which it is maintained. *Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's* is one half of His comprehensive maxim of duty. Nowhere do we find stronger assertions than in the pages of the New Testament, of the right by which *kings reign and princes decree justice.* Nowhere, certainly, is that right based upon ground so high, or connected so inseparably with principles of religion and with the revealed will of God. The ruler, St. Paul says—and remember, he was speaking of a Nero—*is the minister of God; to thee* (the well-doer) *for good; for wrath to him that doeth evil:* in either case, *God's minister, attending continually,* by His appointment, *upon this very thing. Judge not, that ye be not judged,* is no prohibition of the tribunal of justice or of the office of the judge. Only let the heart of the judge, in the exercise of his office, be full of humility and of compassion; only let him remember that common infirmity, that universal sinfulness, in which he himself is the fellow and the brother of him who stands at his bar for judgment; only let him acknowledge with becoming thankfulness that Divine goodness, of grace and of providence, which alone has made him to differ; and his administration of justice may be the offspring of a

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Christian devotion, the exercise of a calling in which he was called, of a ministry *acceptable, well-pleasing to God.* Not of him, so exercising his office, did Christ say, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

Nor do we understand Him to blame the expression in common society of a righteous displeasure against deeds and against doers of iniquity. It is not unchristian to testify in serious terms of condemnation a sincere abhorrence and detestation of evil. There is not too much, but too little, amongst us of moral indignation against works of cruelty, vice, and corruption. It is no charity to call evil good, or to refrain, out of a misplaced tenderness, from calling evil evil. Only let us remember, we say again, what we ourselves are, and where; sinners, by nature at least and by propensity; living amidst abounding temptations, by which we have been or at any time may be overcome: let us speak therefore in humility, speak in sincerity, and speak in truth: and even this judgment shall not be that which Christ condemns, but rather that which is His witness and His remembrancer in the midst of a world lying in wickedness.

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Judge not, that ye be not judged. There is no denying that the world is full of such judgments as are here forbidden: needless, uncharitable, false, and hypocritical judgments.

(1) How little of our conversation upon the faults of others is in any sense necessary! Most often we go out of our way to introduce it. We want something to talk of, and this comes. No sense of duty actuates us. Our little help is not wanted in branding crimes which society is ashamed of. And as for the smaller faults or follies of our neighbours, if they pass without censure, no harm is done. Our judgments are most often gratuitous, willing, wanton judgments; passed in idleness and unconcern; prompted by no feeling of duty; far, far worse, therefore, than any dulness, than any silence.

(2) And if needless, then uncharitable too. There can be no charity in taking for our subject one whom we cannot praise and need not blame. But far more than this. Examine the judgments themselves. How full of suspicion! How unwilling to allow a merit not patent! How ready to imagine a bad motive, where by the nature of the case (man being the judge) we cannot see nor

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know it! How prone to put the worst possible construction, instead of the best! How intolerant of the supposition of virtue! How unwilling to regard any man as actuated by a pure disinterestedness or a lofty principle! The judgments passed in society upon our fellow-men are as uncharitable in their nature as they are needless in their utterance.

(3) And how many of them are false judgments! Who has not had experience, in his own circle, of rumours not exaggerated only, but absolutely baseless? In the case of great men—princes and statesmen, whose actions and characters are, in a sense, public property—I may go further, and say, in the case of the throne itself—we can all remember instances of injurious tales, industriously spread and universally credited, which time, or inquiry, or (it may be) death only, has scattered to the winds for ever. Just so it is in the scandals of humbler life. Stories affecting the conduct, public or secret, of individuals living and moving amongst us, spring up from time to time, we know not whence nor how; are busily repeated by the talebearers of a town; have a short-lived but scarcely disputed prevalence; and at last either

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pass by to make room for a calumny newer and more exciting, or are exposed by further inquiry as absolutely worthless and lying. A fearful responsibility rests upon the propagators of such judgments. Lives have been sacrificed erenow upon the altar of a false judgment. The peace of families is rudely broken or insidiously undermined, and no after regret can ever repair the ruin once wrought by the machinations of a lying tongue. It may be said with literal truth that a needless and a censorious judgment is certain to be, in great part, also a false judgment. Exaggeration and coarseness of colouring are essential to its success: it cannot afford to examine evidence or to consider circumstances: he who would thus judge must judge credulously, judge cruelly, and judge unfairly.

(4) There is yet another point. Our Lord teaches us that the judgments of which He here speaks are always inconsistent, and therefore also (in His view) hypocritical judgments. The familiar figure which He employs is that of a man offering to remove from the eye of another a small particle of straw or splinter of wood, while in his own eye there is all the time something far larger and more injurious; something

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which is, by comparison with the other, as a beam of wood to a splinter. The man who is so quick-sighted to the faults of his neighbour is sure to be chargeable with greater faults of his own. How true to human experience! It is always the sinner who suspects sin. It is the practised deceiver who imagines and imputes deceit. It is the unchaste man who spreads the tale of immorality, and believes no one pure because he himself is defiled. There is ever an affinity between sin and sin; and where the virtuous man mixes unharmed and unsuspecting among his neighbours, the depraved heart scents the presence of depravity, and betrays itself by the very keenness of its search and by the very loudness of its censure. Thus the man given to judging becomes not only uncharitable but a hypocrite. You may be quite sure that that man does not really care for virtue. It is not that his love of holiness is offended and scandalized by another's transgression. If it were, he would throw a veil over it. There is no real abhorrence of evil where there is a readiness to declaim against it. So much is this truth recognized and understood amongst men, that it is no uncommon thing, in the

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annals of criminal justice, for a man conscious of guilt to betray himself by the severity of his condemnation of it in another. There is at least —if there be not more nor worse than this—in the man who is thus ready to seat himself in the chair of judgment, that spirit of the self-righteous, self-deceiving Pharisee, which was in our Lord's sight more offensive and far more hopeless than even the opener vice of the publican and the sinner.

Such are some of the characteristics of that spirit of judgment which is here condemned. And however common the fault in human life, and the condemnation of the fault in sacred teaching, we must feel, every one of us, that the topic is too important and too urgent to be always passed over in the exercise of a ministry of Christian exhortation. This sin of judging is prevalent everywhere, prevalent certainly amongst ourselves. Rudeness of retort, bitterness of invective, suspicion of bad motives, detraction and disparagement of fair actions, repetition of calumnies, invention of slanders, coarse unmannerly taunts and secret insidious imputations—these things are rife amongst us to an extent deeply damaging to our Christian

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consistency; and they constitute, I fear, something of what St. Jude calls *spots in our feasts of charity*, intruding themselves, in thought and feeling, into our meetings for worship, and eating out the heart's core from many an offering of devotion.

2. Let us then, by the help of our Lord's words now under consideration, examine somewhat more closely the reasons for prohibiting this habit of judgment.

(1) *With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.* There is a retaliation in such things, which our Lord makes here a reason for not provoking it. There is a law of retribution, both with man, and also (with reverence be it spoken) on the part of God also. *Judge not*, therefore, *that ye be not judged.* The censorious man will have his censor. If he errs, if he falters, if he sins, men will point at him and not spare. The merciful man will be mercifully judged. Men will remember, in the day of his halting, how often he threw a veil over human frailty, hoped where he could not believe, and covered that which he could not justify. Such a man will find that men mourn over him and triumph not,

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if he in his turn should ever fall under temptation.

But this is a small matter, that we should be judged or not judged of any human tribunal. No doubt our Lord spake rather of God's than of man's judgment, when He said the words, *Judge not, that ye be not judged. He shall have judgment without mercy*, wrote an Apostle after Him, *who hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* We do not mean—God forbid—that a mere abstinence from censorious judgment will purchase for a sinner exemption from the sentence due to his own sins; but this we may say, that a merciful spirit in judging others will both be regarded as an indication of good in the man otherwise not blameless, and will save him from that aggravation of guilt which belongs to him who has both sinned and judged.

(2) Again, such judgment as is here forbidden is an invasion of God's peculiar office. *Vengeance is Mine; I will recompense, saith the Lord. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* Judgment is blasphemy: it is the claiming by a creature of

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the attributes of God. It is to anticipate the judgment of the last day, and, by anticipating it against another, to anticipate it for one's self.

(3) But more than this: to judge is to betray in ourselves a root of self-ignorance, self-complacency, and self-righteousness. No man could thus judge, who really felt himself to be a sinner. No man could offer to pull out the mote from his brother's eye who knew himself to have a beam in his own eye. It is the very sin of the Pharisee, who *said, I see*, and *therefore his sin remained.* It is the one sin to which our Lord had no mission; the sin of him who desires not a Saviour, and must therefore be left to the experiment of saving himself.

(4) And as the root of this unchristian judgment is in self-ignorance, so the fruit of it is definite injury to the cause of the Gospel, to the soul of our neighbour, and, most of all, to our own. Who can love so unlovely a Christianity? Who is not disgusted and alienated by that religion which clothes itself in a garb so odious? Much cause have young Christians, more especially, to guard against a habit of censoriousness and unchristian judgment. They know not the

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deterring effect of a morose and churlish spirit: they know not how they set men against their Master, by disobeying thus directly that Master's rule. And who is ever benefited by such judgments? Who was ever cured of a fault by being thus corrected? Who ever learned a Gospel from the lips of a judge? Many, on the other hand, are they who have quenched in themselves, by such means, the spirit of holiness, which is the spirit of love. They have learned to *trust in themselves that they were righteous, and to despise others*, till at length there was no relic in them of that likeness by which men could *take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.*

(5) Lastly, and in particular, the whole spirit of the self-constituted judge is, in reality, a spirit of hypocrisy. When he professes to be distressed by the fault of his brother, he has in truth within him a tenfold greater fault of his own. When he offers his help to his brother in getting rid of his sin, he does it in a spirit destitute of love, because destitute of sympathy. He knows not his own weakness: he offers a strength which he has not. He cares not for the cure: he cares

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only for the distinction, for the superiority, of the healer. It is a dignified thing to heal another's blindness: self may exalt itself in the remedy, as self exalted itself in the discovery, of the disease. And therefore this is the only advice which the All-wise Physician can give to the self-exalting and self-ignorant pretender, *First cast out the beam out of thine own eye:* first correct and humble before Me that pride which is the arch-malady and the arch-sin in man: *and then* at last *shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. When thou art converted* —not before—*strengthen thy brethren. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me: then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.*

Hear then the conclusion of the whole matter.

No man is fit, in his own strength, to be the counsellor or the guide of man.

Every man has his own faults and his own sins; and it is only self-ignorance which makes him overlook them.

If any man undertakes to judge another, he thereby judges himself: *for thou that judgest doest*

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the same things, or art at least a partaker of the same fallen nature.

Let a man first look into himself. Let him try and examine himself as in the sight of God: let him drag his own transgressions to the light of God's judgment, and pass sentence with an unsparing strictness upon his own omissions of duty, upon his own commissions of sin.

Then at length, humbled and self-abasing, he may hope to fulfil in some degree the inspired admonition, *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him.*

Instead of talking of him to others—holding up his faults and infirmities to scorn, ridicule, or condemnation—he will rather *go and tell him his fault between themselves alone*, in the earnest desire, in the humble prayer, to gain him over to repentance, and thus to salvation.

Thus will he obey in one the two rules of Holy Scripture, *Consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted;* and, *Consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.*

Then will all haste to judge, and all alacrity to condemn, be for ever done away; and he who has first received of Christ's Spirit will be

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enabled to *judge a righteous judgment*, and to *hide* in Christ's blood *a multitude of sins.*

One concluding caution suggests itself.

There is such a thing as indifference, as looseness in judging. There are men who avoid judging, but who avoid it for this very reason—because they care not for salvation, and believe not in judgment.

This is often the later stage of a career of iniquity; when the distinctions between good and evil are nearly obliterated, and a spirit of indolence and of indulgence has seated itself perforce in the throne of conscience and of the love of God.

Let no man count this a Christian spirit, or this a Christian old age.

It is meant that we should feel sin as an enemy, and that we should weep bitter tears over the transgressor who keeps not God's law.

To be indifferent to sin is to have gone far in the devil's service; to have destroyed the edge of conscience, and to have departed finally and for ever from the living God.

To love the sinner, and yet to hate the sin, is a combination found (in its perfection) in God

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only. In Him it was manifested in not sparing His own Son; in giving Him up for the sinner, and yet in demanding His sacrifice for the sin.

So, in its measure, should it be with us. Let us judge sin, and yet not judge the sinner: let us mourn the one, and intercede for the other: let us persuade him to forsake his sin, and draw him by the bands of love toward One who so loved as to die for him.

Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

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XIV.

Christ counsels Discrimination.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."—Matt. vii. 6.

LL are not fit to reprove. The man who would pull out the mote from a brother's eye must beware lest there be all the time a beam in his own. Let him first clear his own vision from distortion and interruption, then will he be able, consistently and profitably, to correct the obliquity of another's.

This was our last subject.

To-day we have an opposite truth before us.

All are not fit to be reproved. Besides the question, Who shall teach? there is another question, Whom? When the instructor has

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qualified himself for his work by a vigilant and unsparing introspection; when he has by resolution and grace cast out of his own eye the beam which would render insight into another's case impossible, or counsel for another's case insulting; then will arise another inquiry, only less important than the former, To whom shall I turn myself? Where shall I find the object of my Christian commission? To whom shall I speak the word of brotherly counsel? on whom shall I lay the hand of Gospel healing? And the answer is, Take heed to this point as to the former. Choose well and wisely the object of thy physicianship of souls, for there are those who would but spurn the Saviour's offer, and bring upon themselves by such contempt a tenfold condemnation. From such persons, in such a condition, mercy itself says to thee, Withhold thy hand! refrain from obtruding that which is morally certain to be refused! *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

Such I believe to be the simple and natural connexion of the text with its context. And we can

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see, however imperfectly, its solemn and impressive bearing upon many particulars of Christian duty.

Who would not be shocked, our Lord asks, by seeing a victim destined for God's altar, rudely seized and mangled by those hungry and savage dogs which prowl everywhere about the streets of an Eastern city? Which of us would not account it a painful and horrible desecration if we saw a morsel of the sacramental bread thrown to an animal for its food? What could be more senseless, more criminal, in its wastefulness, than to suffer a pearl or a precious stone to be dropped into the trough from which the swine eat, lost to the family treasures, and irritating rather than tempting to the creatures whose nutriment it is to spoil? Even such is the folly, such the profaneness, of offering the holy and precious things of the Gospel to those who resemble these animals in their uncleanness or in their ferocity.

Thus the precept before us falls into an exact consistency with some of the plainer maxims of the Old Testament Scriptures.

He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot.

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Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee.

Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way.

A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.

Our Lord here teaches us that these experiences of life, and these suggestions of common sense, have an application also to the communication of the Gospel.

1. *There is a mischief as well as a folly in that zeal which is without discretion.*

It is to incur a very serious responsibility, to divorce truth from wisdom; to exhibit what calls itself, and what the world will regard as the true Gospel, in utter severance from courtesy and prudence, from good taste, good breeding, and good sense. A serious responsibility. It is a putting asunder of things which God has joined together. It is a joining together of things which God has put asunder. It is to represent Christ Himself, not as the Author of every good and perfect gift; not as the original constructer of man's being, the implanter of all that is lovely and beautiful and of

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good report, and therefore, by a necessary consequence, mindful of these things in all His subsequent communications with the being thus endowed; but rather as some interloper in another's work, who cares not what He disarranges or mutilates or violates, if He may but develop some one fragment of the being into a disproportionate, distorted, and disfiguring activity.

It is the Creator who redeems. The soul which He would save He also made. All that is in it of strength and beauty, of vigour and delicacy, of judgment and perception, of conscience and of taste—however disparaged and misdirected and spoilt by the Fall—He yet recognizes, when He speaks in Revelation, as a relic of the original handiwork, and nothing which is really in the one will be really forbidden or forgotten in the other. Who can bring against the Saviour one true instance of rudeness, of insolence, of overbearing peremptoriness, or presumptuous self-obtrusion? Was He not as perfect in the propriety of His consideration as in the purity of His holiness? Will not he who indeed copies his Saviour be as exact in his courtesy as exemplary in his conduct?

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Then what the Master is, that would He have His servant be. There is a zeal, even in His service, which is without discretion. There is an obtrusion of His Gospel upon the wrong person, at the wrong moment, in the wrong place, in the wrong way, which is not only beside the mark as to its effect, but also displeasing to Him in its nature.

This in general.

2. *There is such a thing as an aptitude and an inaptitude for receiving the Gospel.*

He that is of God, saith Christ Himself, *heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep. Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word.* There is an aptitude, a previous aptitude, or else the contrary, for receiving the Gospel.

We shall not enter into secrets too deep for us, though we are upon the very margin of them when we thus speak. But it is not of an inaptitude ascribed or ascribable to God, that the words before us are written. They who resemble, in the debasement and defilement of a human nature, the unclean animals named in the text, were not made so by their Creator. God made man

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upright: it is not of Him that the higher animal has invaded the precincts of the lower, and that men come to be designated by the attributes of dogs and swine. We speak only of what is, not of what ought to be. One man is ready for the Gospel; another is at present irreceptive, incapable of it.

Is it not so?

See that man, wholly set upon his gains; scheming and bargaining, hoarding and investing, counting and gloating over his mammon money, from morning till evening: is there anything there for the Gospel to fasten upon? Is he open to the contemplation of the holy—to the appreciation of the pearl of great price? The Gospel has no money value. It belongs to a different region, in which men reckon not by pence and pounds. It may make him the poorer. It may bid him sell and give to the needy. It may bid him forego some doubtful advantage, and refuse some unlawful gain. It certainly will not teach him a short road to riches, or forward him by one step in the race of mercenary rivalries. There is no inlet there for the Gospel.

And see another wholly given to his passions;

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tied and bound by the chain of some foolish and fatal lust; after each experience of its misery seeking it yet again; never seriously setting himself to deliver his soul, or even asking, *Is there not a lie in my right hand?* Can that man, as he is, receive or be approached by the Gospel? There is a present inaptitude for it, which makes its obtrusion not a folly only, but a mischief.

Or once again, see that vain, frivolous woman, living only for pleasure; measuring and weighing life by its ornaments and by its amusements, ignorant of the very soul within, of the eternity before her. With what hope can you force upon her the mention of a salvation which she does not desire, of a Saviour in whom she can see no beauty and no fitness? This is not the moment. God may bring it, but not now.

Or look at that vast concourse of people, gathered from all towns and villages, to a great annual spectacle: all bent upon one thing: some upon making profit by it, but many—a vast majority, it may be—set only upon the fullest possible enjoyment of a rare and long-expected holiday. Do you suppose that this is the opportune moment for preaching to them the Gospel? Will you placard

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the trees with texts of Scripture, and erect your pulpit upon the very racecourse? Surely, if there is meaning in words, the text forbids such an incongruity. There is an inaptitude in the place, if not in the people; in the time, if not in the audience: and He who would have *all things done decently and in order* will not choose that moment for spreading abroad that which is holy, or opening to idle gaze the pearl of countless price. Not thus are souls won: not thus is the secret work wrought in such as shall be saved.

3. *There is no merit in so uttering the Gospel as that it is sure to be rejected.*

If there is an evil in that zeal which is without discretion, assuredly there is a far greater evil in that forwardness which is without zeal.

We may not approve, we may think that the text discourages, the obtrusion of the Gospel upon persons indisposed or unprepared for it. And yet, if this be done with a loving earnestness which cannot repress the fire that burns within; which so longs for human happiness and for a Saviour's glory, that it must speak and must strive, even without warrant and against hope; we respect even while we blame. But I fear there is in these days

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an imprudence which is without zeal. There is an idea that it is our business to utter the Gospel without reference to the result; nay, in spite of the moral certainty that, so uttered, it will be rejected. And this just to discharge a duty, just to free the conscience, just to escape the blame of not having been faithful! Now this is a wrong and a self-deceiving notion. You cannot too much desire to save a soul: you cannot be too brave in expressing your own convictions, even of the deepest and most sacred kind, with this object: but to consider yourself bound to utter a form of words for the sake of doing so, because Christ will be angry with you if you do it not, even though your heart burns with no zeal, and your judgment warrants no hope of its being for good—this is a superstition; this will neither save your soul, nor the souls of those that listen. The value of confessing Christ by speaking of Him to others must be tested by the motive which prompts and by the judgment which guides it.

4. *There is a dignity about the true Gospel, as well as a condescension.*

It is an unhappy thing when the offer of life in Christ Jesus—and that is the Gospel—is so stated

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or so pressed upon men as to make it a favour to close with it. I mean, when the attitude of the messenger of peace is that rather of a suppliant than of an ambassador; of one who grovels at the feet of men to win a hearing for his message, instead of coming as an accredited agent of the great King, offering to His rebellious subjects the grace of reconciliation and of holiness. There is a way of preaching the Gospel which goes far beyond entreaty, far beyond persuasion the most earnest, or expostulation the most importunate. It is a great matter, as regards the aspect of religion towards the world, that it be made plain to the hearer by him who proclaims to him the Gospel, that, if he will not receive it, this is not because it is beneath, but because it is above him; because there is in it a height to which he cannot attain, a depth which he cannot fathom; insomuch that to despise it argues him blind and ignorant and sin-bound, and proves him, by his own judgment, *unworthy of everlasting life.* The true Gospel has its aspect of dignity as well as of condescension: its solemn warning, *Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;* as well as its gentle invitation, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

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5. *There is a salutary humiliation in the remembrance that in some states of mind and of life the Gospel is too good for us.*

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine. If the Gospel does not move us; if we hear it with no sense of its value; if we find in the offer of a Divine life no attraction, and see in Christ Himself no beauty that we should desire Him; then this proves that we are at present, or that up to this time we have been, too low, too earthly, too sensual for it; so far gone from the glory of a being created in God's likeness, that we are rather, in the sight of God and His Angels, like the dogs and the swine of His inferior, His irrational creation. With what presumption, what assurance, what arrogance, do men sit in judgment upon the Divine Gospel! How do they presume, not only to canvass its evidences, and ask (as men must ask) how shall they know it to be indeed Divine; but also, when they do profess so to regard it, still to judge its separate utterances, still to bring to the bar this precept and that revelation—perhaps even to write books upon the character and life of Jesus, and please their own fancy as to the light, reverent or irreverent, in

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which they shall set each! The words before us seem to suggest a very opposite thought. There are states of mind and of life, Christ says Himself, in which you are irreceptive, incapable of the Gospel; not too wise for it, but too foolish; not too high for it, but too low; in which, therefore, mercy itself bids the Evangelist to pass you by in a half-disdainful silence. There is humiliation in this, and in such humiliation is warning. If I cannot hear God's voice in Christ's Gospel, it is perhaps because I am like the dog or the swine, to which the holy thing is common and the precious thing vile. There is a beam in the eye, which makes illusions real and realities shadowy: there is a muffling of the inward ear, which makes the very trump of God an inaudible, at least an uncertain sound. The Gospel is too good for me—it is out of my reach and cognizance—if it be not felt by me as the very medicine and balm of my soul. Let that thought bring me, by God's grace, to self-knowledge, bring me to earnest prayer, bring me at last to true humility and to an impregnable faith!

The singular precept which has now occupied us must not be entirely dissevered from its context before and after.

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(1) Read it in its connexion with the words of the first verse of the chapter, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

It is not for us to pronounce upon the spiritual state of those around us. We are not to seat ourselves in the chair of judgment, and say, The Gospel is not for this man or that: one is too prejudiced to listen, and another too sinful to be saved. These things are in God's hand, not ours. He can read the heart: it is not for us. Christ might judge thus: we cannot. We can only use discretion in our treatment: we thank Him for not requiring us to exercise discernment in our intuition. We must not judge, as we would not be judged. If we refrain from forcing the Gospel upon an unwilling ear, let it be because we would obey our Saviour's rule, and because we would not frustrate our Saviour's work. By an injudicious precipitancy we should do harm. Because we would have all men, and each man, to be saved, therefore we do not that which Christ Himself warns us would rather increase condemnation. Let the motive be pure. If we speak, let it be from zeal: if we speak not, let it be from zeal still. Let the thing be done—or else

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let it not be done—in the exercise of all wisdom and of all love; because we have one desire, the eventual good; and because we would seek that one end by means as suitable as they are varied. Let us never say, in proud self-sufficiency, That man is too hard for grace. I have attained: he is outcast. God forbid! *Consider thyself: who made thee to differ? Consider thyself: the first may be last.*

And there are those whose duty it is to *be instant* (as it is written) even *out of season.* Those who *watch for souls, as they that must give account,* are charged even to make the opportunity, which they do not find, of speaking for Christ. A solemn, an anxious responsibility! God forgive the miserable indolence, the shameful cowardice, by which we too often evade it!

How wise and merciful, in this aspect, is the institution of a public ministry and a public service! Here, in this holy place, without judging, without choosing or refusing any, we may preach Christ in the Congregation; and the putting of the difference is yours, not ours. One believes the thing that is spoken, and one believes not. The holy thing, the pearl of price, is offered indiscriminately.

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None can here scoff at it, none can profane or do despite to it. Upon none is the word of reproof pressed affrontingly; yet to all it is addressed, if and as they need it. Even so is it with the Gospel offer. If there be a heart here, knowing its own bitterness, smarting under life's discipline, torn by a recent sorrow, or gradually opening to a higher and holier aspiration; here, under cover (as it were) of multitude, it may drink in the welcome sound, and be chargeable with no hypocrisy: great is the privacy of this publicity, and many are they whom God nurtures by it for His own possession.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

(2) And so, lastly, we would read the precept with the touching words that follow it; *Ask, and it shall be given you.*

As though Christ Himself would say to us, *In all things pray.* If your ministry be hindered by the unworthiness, by the opposition, or by the sinfulness of men; still pray—pray, and faint not. Nay, if you yourselves be evil; if you yourselves be at present amongst those to whom the holy thing must not be offered, nor the pearl of price thrown; still pray—pray, and faint not. Rest not in the mire and clay of a sensual being: acquiesce not in

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a deafness and a deadness which of itself is a mark of ruin: be not willing to let the very hirelings of your Father eat His bread to the full, while you yourself are here in the far country thankful for the swine's husks. Rise and pray. Whosoever you be, and whatsoever, rise and pray: yea, pray without ceasing, and faint not! Soon shall a better light rise upon you: nay, upon him who will only pray, a better light has risen. Day, for him, has dawned, and the day-star risen.

Thus from the apparent incongruity of the two thoughts here brought together—the *Give not* of the one, and *It shall be given* of the other—we would draw an omen of hope. None so bad, but there is One ready to listen to them: if at present man dares not to give, because he fears lest he even aggravate condemnation, there is One who can give, and will—not only of the precious Gospel, but of that inward grace too, which alone can make it availing—if only the knee will bend, and the heart cry out to Him as the Father. Only harden not yourselves in stubborn coldness, in sullen indifference, to the call of the Gospel. Trample it not, in life, under your feet, for indeed you will want it when you come to die. No cry so

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bitter as that of the dying sinner, *Give me of your oil.* No response so fearful as that which declares at last to the life-long self-deceiver, *I never knew you.* Therefore let us give heed now; while the long-suffering of God is still waiting, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

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XV.

The Charter of Prayer.

"Ask, and it shall be given you."—Matt. vii. 7.

PRECEPT concerning Prayer can never lack its connexion with the context before and after.

We might say that it followed naturally from the two rules just laid down; the one a prohibition of judging, the other a command to discriminate. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* On the other hand, *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine,* but exercise good sense, discernment, and prudence, in offering to other men even the treasures and blessings of your Gospel.

To keep these two rules—each and both of them—is not easy. To refrain from sitting in

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judgment upon one another — and yet also to observe and notice characters, to see who is and who is not at this moment receptive of truth and of a Gospel—this is not easy. If you would have this grace, you must pray for it. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.*

Or we might take a wider range, and look back upon the whole of the Discourse: we might call to mind the Beatitudes or Benedictions with which it opens, and the lofty standard which they themselves set us both of heart and life: we might remember the grave declarations of Christian responsibility made in the figures of *the salt of the earth* and *the light of the world;* or the demand of a righteousness exceeding that of Scribe and Pharisee, in all who would enter God's kingdom; or the spiritual application of the Divine Law, extending its rules of conduct to the very thought and soul within; or the warnings against ostentation, against worldliness, against anxiety, against a divided service, which fill the sixth chapter: we might lay all these together, and then ask, *Who is sufficient for these things?* and so arrive at a fuller understanding still of the fitness and appropriateness

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of the charge which is now before us, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

The precept concerning Prayer must ever be suitable in connexion with a Discourse concerning grace and duty.

Looking closely at the passage which now comes before us in its order, extending from the 7th to the 12th verse, we shall see that it contains three chief things—a promise, an argument, and an inference.

1. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

This is the Great Charter of the Gospel. This is that fundamental promise upon which men whose faith was failing, whose heart was burdened, and whose life was miserable, have kept firm hold in the deep of the soul; and while they could do this, have possessed *an anchor, both sure and stedfast,* which not all the waves of this troublesome world could entirely disturb or destroy.

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The nature of Prayer is here illustrated by three similitudes.

(1) Prayer is *asking*. It presupposes a want. No one would pray, who had all that heart could wish. We pray because we want something.

Again, no one would pray for a thing which he could get for himself. There is a pride in us all—and it has its uses—which forbids us to beg while we can get. We pray because we cannot get.

And certainly there are things which we want, and which for ourselves we cannot get.

Such a thing is forgiveness. The washing out of ugly disfiguring stains—stains of past sin—upon the memory, and upon the conscience, and upon the heart. Can a man give himself forgiveness? Can he resolve, and carry out the resolution, that he will not owe God anything? Can he cancel his bad debts by a stroke of his pen, and go forth free and chargeable with nothing? Try it, you who know what it is to have the millstone of guilt round your neck, and assuredly you will find that there is a want, in this one point, which you yourself cannot satisfy!

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And such another thing is grace. Help and strength to do right and to be right with God in the future. To conquer some obstinate sin; some bad habit, bad temper, or hurtful passion; something which is always coming back, always besetting your path, always dogging your steps, and which, though you know it to be wrong, feel it to be burdensome, and believe it to be destructive, yet you cannot overcome, cannot eradicate. To escape from sin, and to fulfil duty, this is beyond you. You want a thing which you cannot get.

Then with reference to these elementary wants of the soul, Jesus Christ says here, *Ask*. Because you want, and because you cannot get, therefore pray. He says not to whom: that is understood. Ask Him who alone can give. *Ask* of God, *and it shall be given you;* given as a gift; given freely; given *without money and without price;* given of God's mercy, and given for the sake of Christ.

(2) Again, Prayer is *seeking*.

Perhaps we have lost something. The man in the Gospel had lost one of his hundred sheep. He had to go after it till he could find it. The

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woman in the same Gospel had lost one of her ten pieces of silver. She must light a candle, and sweep the house, and search for it diligently.

Or else we are in quest of something which we have never yet had. It is not that it is lost, but rather that it is not yet found. It was so with the merchant in the Gospel, seeking goodly pearls. He went everywhere in his pursuit of this precious merchandise, till at last he found the one pearl of great price which was worth his whole fortune to purchase.

Thus the second illustration of Prayer is not a mere repetition of the first.

Prayer is not asking only. It is seeking.

A man might ask for a thing, and go his way; might accept a refusal, and resign himself to his want. If we would pray, as Christ bids us, it must not be thus with us. We must not only ask, but seek also; seek diligently, and seek till we find.

The difference between man and man (among professed Christians at least) lies much here. Both ask, but only one seeks. If you saw them at their prayers, you would think they were of one mind. Forgiveness and grace — yes, both

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ask for that. Both say, *Forgive us our debts;* and both say, *Deliver us from evil.* But the one rises up, and goes away to forget, or goes to contradict and to prevent, his own petition: the other, when he has done asking, goes on seeking; his thoughts still run upon that which he has asked of God; he endeavours to *pray without ceasing*, in this sense at least, that he cherishes the temper and spirit of a praying man, tries to live accordingly, and values everything in proportion as it brings nearer to him that which is the object of his search—that living faith without which no man can please God, and that consistent holiness without which no man shall see Him.

Seek, and ye shall find. The search is itself the pledge of the success. God approves of this seeking; of this earnest following up of prayer in a praying spirit: and He in His own good time will crown it certainly with His reward. *He that seeketh findeth.*

(3) In the third place, prayer is *knocking;* knocking as at a closed door; the knocking of one outside, who will and must be let in.

The poor foolish Virgins in the Parable knocked in this way: but it was too late. The door was

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finally shut; they could only knock on fruitlessly, and remain outside in the darkness which they had chosen.

But in this life it is not too late. The promise is, *To him that knocketh* in this life *it shall be opened.*

No figure is more expressive to us men than this of a closed door.

And is it not intelligible to us why our Lord Jesus Christ should make it a type of our state?

Who does not feel as if there were a door at least between him and God? as if at least he were in one room and God in another? or rather, as if he were outside, in the chill air and dim darkness, and God in that abode of light unapproachable, which no being in flesh and blood can enter and live?

It is not only the man dead in sin who feels thus: it is the experience of most men in the early days of faith: it is the experience too often of Christian people, when after an interval of business or of society, they again betake themselves to the work (is it not a work?) of prayer and calling upon God.

Now at this closed door—for such it appears

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to us—we must knock, and knock, and knock still, until we are heard. In addition to that first illustration, which is simple asking; and in addition to that second illustration, which is consistent seeking; there is this third illustration also, which is persistent knocking. A man might ask, and not stay to receive: a man might seek, and rest in his seeking: therefore it is added, a man must knock again and again at God's door, in spite of long delays, many discouragements, and great disappointments.

When the man went at midnight to his friend's house for the three loaves, it was only his continued knocking which was able to gain his point. *He will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Knock* thus, *and it shall be opened.*

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

That which is true, as a general rule, in human life, is true as an infallible promise in the things of God.

Even in earthly matters you see how earnestness

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wins the day; how a man determined to take no denial gains his petition; how a man indefatigable in pursuing his end, whether it be riches, honour, or wisdom, reaches it at last; how a man resolute to force an entrance opens by continued knocking the door closed against the first summons. It is so, commonly, in human life. Every one—to speak generally—conquers by perseverance.

But in heavenly things, in the affairs of the soul, in the kingdom of grace, it is so without an exception. God giveth liberally to all who ask: if ye have not, depend upon it, ye ask not!

O the faint-heartedness, the coldness and slackness, the unbelief and rareness, of our asking! Can we care for that which we ask so feebly? Could we go away without that which we came for, if we either knew its worth or believed its promise?

2. We have, in the second place, an argument. Our Lord condescends to enforce His promise by a reason. And that reason is drawn from human experience; from the known operation of a parental instinct, even where there is both a fallen nature, and even (it might be added) a personal sinfulness.

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Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?

What man—what human being—how much more shall God!

Bread and fish were the two chief kinds of food among the peasants of Galilee. The one the staff of life; the other the simple relish eaten with it. It was thus in the feeding of the five thousand. Five loaves of bread and two little fishes formed the starting-point of the miraculous supply. In those two forms was the supply itself marvellously expanded, until all had eaten and left thereof. It was so in the mysterious meal at the Sea of Tiberias after the Resurrection. *They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.* It seems as though the very words of the promise would remind us that the prayers of man should be for necessary things: for the supply of wants, not

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of fancies; for the support of life, not its superfluities.

No earthly parent — such is the argument— when his son cried to him for bread, would mock him with the present of a stone. Still less, when the son asked for a fish, would he put into his hand that deadly serpent which at first sight might seem to resemble it. Human instinct is too strong and too true for such mockery or for such injury. And if this be so with you; if even sinful men—partakers of a corrupt nature, infected with personal defilement, which might be supposed to blunt the feelings and chill the affections—are yet so far faithful to the voice within as to listen to their children's cry, and answer it with their best; how much more—it is an argument (as it is called) *à fortiori*—shall your Father in heaven —He who stands to you all in the relation of a Father; He who in Christ Jesus has revealed Himself as the Father of His erring, rebellious, and sinful creatures; He who is altogether holy, altogether free from infirmity, as well as pure from evil—how much more shall He give good things—St. Luke says, *give His Holy Spirit*—to them that ask Him?

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We notice the expression, *give good things.*

Then, if we ask bad things for ourselves, God will not give them.

If the son, instead of asking bread, asks a stone, will the father show his love by granting it?

If the son, instead of asking a fish, asks a serpent, would it be a proof of love, or the contrary, to grant his petition?

Would not love itself say, I know better what is for thy good; and that—not the bad thing—will I give thee?

When the mother of St. Augustine prayed to God that He would not suffer her loved son to go to Rome, because she dreaded the persecutions then threatening the city, he went notwithstanding; and it was in Italy that he found Christ. Afterwards he said—as the words stand on record in his well-known *Confessions — What was it, O my God, that she sought of Thee with many tears? Was it not that thou wouldest not suffer me to set sail for Rome? But Thou, in Thy deep counsels, and listening to the hinge of her desire*—not to the form of the petition, but to that on which it hinged and turned—*didst disregard the thing which she then*

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asked, that Thou mightest do in me that which she was ever asking—namely, the conversion of my soul.

God will give good things. He will not give the exact thing asked, if that be not the good thing. If one blessing be asked, and be not given, see whether the refusal itself may not be conducive to another and a higher good.

The argument by which our Lord Jesus Christ confirms this promise is one of deep comfort, as well as of strong assurance.

It all turns upon the relation in which God stands to us.

If God were not our Father, the whole argument would fall to the ground.

It is because He is our Father—because He looks upon us, though (as our Lord expressly says) *being evil*, as His children—that the thought of His vast immeasurable distance from us in goodness and holiness becomes not a terror, but a strong hope to us. Because He is good, and we are evil; because He is all holy, and we are so stained and debased with sin; therefore everything that is true of us, in relation to our children, must much more be true of Him: namely, that He

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will give us only that which is good, and all that which is good for us; never reproaching us, never *upbraiding* (as St. James says) because we have asked much and often before, but only waiting for the cry of the heart, and then pouring out all that is for our happiness and all that is for our good.

God is our Father; and because He is so, all the rest follows.

God is our Father. And who made Him so? Could we make Him so? Could the greatest of saints have made God his Father? Nay, it is written, just on the contrary, *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts;* not to make you sons, but *because ye are sons;* because the redemption which is in Christ Jesus was for all mankind; and because in Him, whether we will or no, children of Adam and of the Fall are made children of God and of His grace.

It remains then that we stir up the gift that is in us.

Many men and women wait all their life long asking, How shall I make God my Father? By what labours, by what feelings, by what prayers

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—which come not—shall I purchase for myself the sonship and the adoption?

No one ever yet could do this. No one ever earned for himself a father. That is a gift and a relation prior to all action and to all feeling. And even thus is it with God.

Christ seems to bid us all to kneel down and say the first two words of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father*, and never question and never doubt whether they are true words. God never yet repelled any man, or reproached any man, however sinful, for presuming to treat Him and to call upon Him as his Father already, without choice and without merit of his, in Jesus Christ our Lord. *Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.*

3. In the last place, we have an inference from the promise, and from the argument by which it is confirmed.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Since God, your Father, gives you all that you ask Him for—all, that is, which He sees to be for your good—you must imitate His example, as

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alone you can, towards your brethren; towards those fellow-men who must be your brothers, because they, like you, are God's children, God's sons.

You cannot give anything back to God for all His benefits that He is ever doing to you.

You can just praise Him, certainly: you can love Him: you can assemble yourselves together, in His House and at His Table, and repay Him for what He has given by receiving more. But there your power of requital is bounded and terminated as respects God.

But there is a way in which you can show your gratitude for all that God does for you, and still more for all that God is to you (which is far more) as your Father, your Father in heaven. And that is, by handing on His gifts; by representing and reproducing to others that which He first is to you.

You can do as God does, He helping you, in this respect. Just as He does to you what He sees to be for your good, so can you do to others just what you, in their place, would wish them to do to you.

Place yourselves, in thought and idea. in the condition, in the situation, in the circumstances of

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another. Imagine yourself—it is no fantastic conception,—imagine yourself in the place of father or mother, in the place of brother or sister, in the place of servant or apprentice, in the place of friend or neighbour: then think what would you, in that altered place, feel to be just, feel to be considerate, feel to be kind, towards you; what would give you pleasure, what would make you happy, what would promote your welfare in soul, in body, in estate: and do just that. Do it, not once only, or in one thing, but always and in all things. Make it your study so to act and so to speak: and you will be keeping God's Law; you will be fulfilling the voices of the Prophets; you will be going to the root of all duty and of all obedience; because you will be living by the rule of Christian love, and Christian love is the fulfilling of the Law.

It is not that you will always do just that which for the moment will give pleasure. If your son asks a stone, you will refuse it: if your son asks a serpent, you will refuse it. Even so, if something is desired of you by another, which would be useless to him or injurious, you will show your love by withholding it, even as God does. Chastisement is sometimes needful; and he who refrains from it

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loves not but rather hates his child. Even so must the Christian sometimes give pain: but if, like his Father in heaven, he does it with a good purpose and a loving mind, he will be not breaking, but rather fulfilling, *the royal law:* he will still be doing to others that which he, on a large view, would that they should do to him: he too will be imitating God, and reflecting the image of his Father which is in heaven.

Only let us see that this thought for others be indeed the expression below of a faith and a gratitude having their object above.

The subject suggests three questions.

i. *Who among us prays?*

It is a profitable question, at the close of any opportunity of worship, What particular thing, for soul or body, have I asked of God at this time? Was there any particular sin of which I asked the forgiveness? any particular danger, from which I asked deliverance? any particular grace of spirit or life, of which I asked the gift or the increase?

If not—we will not indeed say that a true Christian may not still have enjoyed an hour of peaceful communing with his God, for the strengthening of his faith and the quickening of his love—but we

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must fear that it is far more likely that the act of worship has been a lifeless form, meaning nothing, imploring nothing, and therefore too surely receiving nothing from the Lord. *What wilt thou,* Christ says, *that I should do for thee?*

ii. *Who among us has*—that is, knows and feels that he has—*a Father in heaven?*

That is the great Gospel revelation: the disclosure to sinful creatures that God loves them; loves them in Christ; has restored them to the home and to the family of His love, and now regards them and deals with them as His sons and daughters in Christ Jesus.

He is a Christian indeed who believes this, believes it not as a doctrine but as a fact, and instead of feeling towards God as a slave towards a hard taskmaster, looks up to Him in all things with entire trust and unswerving love. That is a Christian.

If so, what are we?

We speak not now of open or secret sins, testifying against us as rebels and enemies towards Him who died for us. We speak not of a spirit of deep carelessness, of utter ungodliness; choosing to live away from God, and to keep Him at a distance

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from us while we can. But we may address persons having more than a form of godliness; persons anxious to do their duty, mindful of the judgment, desirous to escape wrath and to save the soul; and we may ask even of them, Do they know anything of God as their Father? of a hand, almighty and most loving, guarding and guiding them? of a path ordered for them in all things, and leading, whether over rough ground or smooth, towards a sure rest and a certain dwelling-place? When they pray, do they say, *Our Father?* When they refuse the evil and choose the good, is it from a spirit of love, from a longing desire to be perfect even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect?

iii. *Who among us desires to be to others that which God is to him?*

Is not that the true connexion between the last verse of the text and the foregoing verses?

That which God is to us, we ought to be, in our place and measure, to all others.

Then we ought to do them good. That is God's work towards us. He gives us good things. When we ask Him for bad things, He gives them not. That, of itself, is a mark of love: not to do harm. In that point first we must imitate Him. By not

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injuring, in soul or body, in name or fame, by temptation or by discouragement, one brother or one sister, for whom, as for us, God gave His Son. And then, from that first point, we must go on to others: from the negative, the not injuring, to the positive, the doing good; the seeking the welfare of others; the desire and the endeavour to make them happy; happy in the right way; in peace and love, in holiness and in God.

Which of all us lives on this principle, lives for this end?

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XVI.

CHRIST POINTS OUT TO US THE GATE OF LIFE.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."—Matt. vii. 13, 14.

THE Divine Sermon draws to its close. It has explained the nature of that character to which Christ calls men, and of that blessedness to which He invites them. The law given from Sinai has been in part interpreted, in part superseded, by the new law given from the mountain in Galilee, under circumstances and amidst scenes how different! At last it has reached that comprehensive summary of all relative duty, *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

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And there we might say that the Sermon ends, so far as its instructions are concerned. It remains only to urge men to enter in through the gate thus opened, and to caution them against some seducing influences (without and within) which might disappoint their hope of a final entrance into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour.

These are our two remaining subjects.

And first, there is a call to men to enter in through the gate which Christ points out.

If we find anything discouraging in some of the thoughts here suggested, let us not forget that first word, *Enter ye in.* It is not to daunt, it is to incite us, that the holy and merciful Saviour speaks to us thus.

What is the Parable which He proposes to us?

In the far distance there are two gates.

City-gates they are. Inside each, placed as each is in a city wall, there is, hidden from view, a dwelling-place, a collection of human habitations, a city of many mansions. We cannot see within: all is mystery, all is obscurity: the wall hides, the gate intercepts the view.

One of these two gates is wide and ample. It

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seems to invite access, to promise admission. Many could enter it at one time. Judged by this token, the city within it might seem to be the larger and the more magnificent.

The other gate is strait and confined. It is rather a postern or wicket-gate. It looks, in the distance, as though it would scarcely admit one man; as though the city behind must be poor, incommodious, and unattractive.

And to each of these gates there leads a corresponding way.

Toward the wide gate there stretches a broad road. There is ample room upon it for all travellers; and many are in sight at one time, passing commodiously and at their ease along it.

Toward the strait gate there extends a narrow pathway, difficult to find, as well as hard to keep: it winds over mountain sides, along abrupt precipices, here and there across precarious morasses: and if you ask for companions on the journey, they are few and rare in comparison with the passengers by the broad way and towards the wide gate.

Nevertheless, inside that wide gate is *destruction*, perdition, the loss of the soul, the casting away of the man himself: not brightness, but dim dark-

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ness; not happiness, not contentment, not honour nor rest nor peace; but rather misery and suffering; shame too, as the Prophet writes, *shame and everlasting contempt.*

And inside that strait gate, which seemed, at a distance, to promise nothing—at the end of that narrow way which seemed, in the prospect, to lead to nothing—there is that which Jesus Christ calls *life;* that true, that real being—that expansion of every power and every faculty in a congenial climate and in a corresponding sphere—which for the first time makes a man feel and know that he lives; which makes existence, often before a drag and a yoke, an ecstasy and a delight; which calls into vigorous exercise every capacity of happiness, and which stretches forth in prospect into an unlimited duration, inasmuch as it has this characteristic, that it is a life with God and in God, incapable therefore of limit as of change, because they who dwell there, *in the high and holy place,* dwell there with *the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.*

The broad way and the wide gate lead to destruction: the narrow way and the strait gate lead to life—eternal life.

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Enter ye in then *at the strait gate.*

St. Luke says, *Strive to enter in:* struggle, wrestle, contend earnestly, to enter in. It is a work of difficulty: it demands toil and pains.

For what is it? What is this entering in? What does it involve?

1. It involves, first, *a willingness to stand alone.*

We are all, by nature, creatures of imitation. For one person who leads, thousands follow. And even the person who leads has followed some one. No man enters this world as a unit; as a being whose life is altogether detached and severed from all around and from all before him. It ought not to be so. A man must be an unloving, unamiable, unnatural man, to make it so. We ought to be influenced, and we must influence.

In indifferent things, in all matters of mere outward custom and fashion, to be singular is to be foolish. It shows a care about trifles, which is unmanly; or else a desire to be noticed, which is a vanity.

And in all things connected with the life of this world—its trades and professions, its arts and sciences—a man must imitate if he would learn. Learning is imitation. To be original, for all

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except the one man in a million, is to be conceited and to be wrong.

But when we come to things of the soul, to questions of duty and to questions of religion, then a man ought to be not only independent but alone. *To his own Master he standeth or falleth.* It is not enough to be able to say, if indeed it could ever be said with truth, Every one says this; every one does this. That is not the question. The question is only, What is true? and what is right?

And our Lord here warns us that the common opinion and common practice of men, in the things of the soul, is not only an insufficient, but is even a fatal guide, for such as would be saved. It is the way to destruction, He tells us, which is crowded. It is of the wide gate that He says, *Many there be which go in thereat.*

It is not until we deeply ponder the question that we perceive, any of us, how little of this independence we possess, even in the things of the soul.

We take our religion, most of us, at second hand. From our parents, from our teachers, from our friends—from the current ideas, the popular

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notions, of our contemporaries and countrymen—not from reflection, not from conscience, not from the Bible, not from God Himself through Christ by the Spirit—do we derive that little system, poor and unstable and precarious as it is, which serves as our creed while we live, our hope when we die.

Now it is plain that this is one reason why it is difficult to enter in at the strait gate.

To do this, a man must be willing, if necessary, to stand alone.

I do not mean that a man is to frame for himself an eccentric religion, and to conclude that he must be wrong in anything in which he is not singular. This would be the root of all heresy and of all schism. The faith in which he should live and die, if it is to be the true faith, must be the *faith once for all delivered to the saints*, and written down for us in the pages of God's Holy Scriptures.

But this I mean: that every one's religion must be made his own; that he must have a personal hold upon Revelation and the Gospel; that he must know for himself whom he has believed, and why; that he must try everything within; that he

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must find his own faith satisfactory to his own soul; and that he must carry out his own faith consistently in his own life.

In trying emergencies we are deserted by a religion of hearsay. When there is something difficult to be done, when there is something painful to be borne—when we have to do something, or refuse something, which is a matter of life and death in its consequences—then we are left as a mariner without his compass, if we can only say, I thought this must be true because I was brought up to think it so; I was always told that there was a God, and therefore I believed, and therefore I worshipped. Yes; but did you ever try whether there was a God, by asking Him for things, and expecting Him to answer? by calling upon Him till He heard, and receiving help from Him according to your need? If not, you are still destitute of this power to stand alone, which is the first attribute of such as shall be saved.

And certainly in the great emergency of all we shall want this. In death it will be a poor consolation to say; I know of this person and that who believed in Christ: the question will be, Hast thou tried Him? for thyself? in life's joys for

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sobering, in life's sorrows for comfort? then, then only, canst thou hope in Him and rest in Him now.

The multitude throng the broad way: he who would enter into life must be willing, if need be, to walk alone.

2. Again, to enter in at the strait gate requires *a resolute purpose and a submissive will.*

(1) We shall never enter in unless we keep the gate in view.

It is implied in the Parable that the gate of life is less conspicuous than the other.

Many an eye is caught by the wide ample portal which forms the terminus of the broad commodious way. But the narrow gate is in danger of being overlooked in the distance, even as the path which leads to it lies, in part, out of sight.

It is so in the thing signified. We must keep the gate in view, or we shall never reach it. We must see whither we are going, or we shall certainly not keep the way.

How few men are really bent upon being safe at last; upon entering into life, upon reaching heaven!

Nearer objects we all have. We can work for

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an earthly prize. We can *rise early and late take rest* for the wages of this world; for a maintenance, or for a fortune; for something which is to gratify vanity or reward ambition: but the narrow wicket-gate in the far distance—who can see it? who earnestly makes for it?

It was a great sin in the Israelites of old, that *they thought scorn of that pleasant land* which God promised them. How is it with us? What resolute purpose is there in any of us to reach heaven at all hazards? I doubt whether we even remember to pray for it. For deliverance from some pressing anxiety by the way—for daily bread and nightly safety—we can ask for these things: it is well if we *ask* even for them: but for a happy entrance within the gate of life, for a safe admission into the heavenly city, who even prays? much more, who longs, or strives, or struggles?

We ought to fix in our minds, every one of us, by grace, the resolute purpose, cost what it may, to reach heaven.

(2) There is another thing: a submissive will. It is not enough to see the gate: we must also keep the way. And the way is hard to find. *Few there be that find it.* The direction of the road is

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not always obvious. It does not always seem to be the straightest way towards the destined end. It turns and winds, here and there, so that the wayfarer doubts his course. Sometimes it is steep as well as narrow; rough, and full of obstacles, as well as intricate and lonely. All this must be submitted to. A man who would reach the gate cannot choose his way: he must take what comes.

Is it not so in that which we speak of? in the way through this world to heaven?

How hard to find sometimes is the path of duty! Such ambiguous turns, such unsatisfactory windings; such questions arising between safe courses and enterprising, between rigidity and conciliation, between that which shall satisfy conscience and that which shall attract and possibly win souls: and besides these the more exceptional cases, such constant temptations to compromise, such incessant buffetings of inclination, such daily crossing of the will and mortifying of the affections: it is not always easy to find, and certainly it is rarely pleasant to keep, the way that leadeth unto life.

How discouraging oftentimes is the morning

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prayer, in the prospect of a day's trials! How dispiriting generally is the evening prayer, in the retrospect of a day's faults and falls! What wonder is it, if some who have begun a Christian life faint in it and are weary—if some even turn aside in the midst, and *walk no more with Jesus?* And what wonder, if many more, knowing by distant rumour the trials and troubles of the spiritual pilgrimage, put off, day by day and year by year, the work of beginning it; hope against hope that something may make them Christians some day, without their seeking; and that, though they neither see the gate nor keep the way, they may yet find themselves, when they die, inhabitants of the city within it?

3. Once more, and yet more distinctly, this entering in is difficult, because the things within the two gates are *beyond the view of sense. Destruction*, and *life:* what do we know, at present, of either?

We are here imprisoned each of us within body of flesh and blood; imprisoned all of us together within a world of matter, of sense, of time. There is enough, within these prison walls, to occupy all our thoughts; sometimes with images

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of pain, and sometimes with images of pleasure. The cares of life are enough; the pleasures of life are enough; the affections of life, lawful and unlawful, are enough for this: what is left, either of understanding or of interest, when all these are provided for? Thus it comes to pass that most of us are practically unbelievers in that which we see not. Faith, the sight of the unseen, the spiritual apprehension of that which is to the senses invisible, may well be made, in Scripture, the one characteristic, the distinguishing attribute, of such as shall be saved.

Destruction, we say; what is that? A man losing himself, and being cast away? O, surely that can only be the doom (if it means what it seems to mean) of a few very wicked, very monstrous sinners! It cannot be the end of persons whose only fault has been that they lived by sight and not by faith; that they enjoyed the pleasures of common sin for a season: still less, of those who did many things that were good, and heard the Gospel gladly!

And *life—leadeth unto life:* what is that? I cannot understand the pleasure—nay, I cannot catch the meaning—of a life altogether heavenly,

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a life lived in God, a life occupied wholly in seeing His face, uttering His praise, or performing His service. Surely there must be an excuse for me if I cannot as yet desire this; cannot set before myself as an object that which I understand not; cannot earnestly pursue that end which is to me unreal, visionary, transcendental!

And thus, to the difficulty which arises from our unwillingness to stand alone, and from our want of a resolute purpose and a submissive will, must be added this other and yet more fatal impediment—that we live in things which are seen, and cannot apprehend the very idea of the life of heaven and the life of God.

These few considerations will suffice to explain to us why the way of salvation is difficult. And now let us, in conclusion, lay to heart the solemn charge which bids us, nevertheless—notwithstanding the difficulty—at all risks, and at any cost, thus to enter in.

Enter ye in at the strait gate.

Then, if it be difficult, it is certainly not impossible.

With men it may be *impossible: but not with God.*

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One thing is certain: that to this, above other subjects, applies the promise last dwelt upon, *Ask, and ye shall have.*

To enter in, we want nothing but the grace of God. Was that grace ever denied to prayer? Can any one say that he asks, asks earnestly, and asks on, yet receives not? receives not anything in answer?

The purpose of Jesus Christ, in everything which He says to us of the difficulty of being saved, is just this: that, showing us our inability to save ourselves, He may lead us to seek salvation as the free gift of God.

If He points to the multitudes who tread the broad way of indifference, self-indulgence, and sin, it is only to warn us of our danger, and to bring us to God for deliverance.

And in that coming to God—in that first coming—in that coming once—lies the chief part of the great work of salvation.

To go up to that glimmering light which indicates to us the first entrance of the way of life—to throw ourselves upon our knees there, as sinners wanting guidance, wanting help, wanting mercy—is all that we can do: blessed be God, it

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is all that He bids us to do: for He made us, He has watched us, and *He knoweth our frame.*

And he who, by grace, has done just this, is never quite the same man afterwards. He has entered into the presence of, into communication with, a real God: he has received, and he has acted upon, the first spark of grace: and if he will only stay there—still looking upward, still waiting for God—he will find himself guided, he scarcely knows how, into that path of which it is written that *wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein;* into that path, of which the same Prophet has said, *Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it;* into that path, of which, on the whole, the onward course is comfort—of which, certainly, the last end is peace.

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XVII.

Concluding Cautions.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."—Matt. vii. 21.

NTER ye in—strive to enter in—at the strait gate. That is the end in view.

Set before yourself, as the one thing to be made sure, a safe entrance at last through that narrow postern *where but one goes abreast*, but within which is the eternal city of God, the home of light and love and life.

That entrance is difficult. And for many reasons. Because one who would enter into life must be willing (if need be) to travel alone. Because it requires a resolute purpose to reach the gate, and a submissive will to keep the way.

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Because the things within that gate are hidden from view; are beyond the cognizance of sense; are matters of faith, and not of sight.

There remain for consideration some concluding cautions, with reference to certain seducing influences, which might make havoc of the hope of thus entering through the strait gate into the city of God.

1. The first of these is the influence of false teaching.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, all meekness and innocence, *but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

We are told in these days that doctrine is of little consequence. It matters not what we believe, if only we live aright. Not such is the language of Christ. We hear from His own lips the importance which He attaches to true teaching. And the discourses and writings of His Apostles after Him give us the reason for this estimate. Corruptions of doctrine soon develope themselves into corruptions of life. *Take heed unto yourselves*, St. Paul says in his parting address to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, *and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made*

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you overseers. Why this anxiety and earnestness of exhortation? *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.* And before the Volume of Inspiration is completed, we begin to see the practical illustration of St. Paul's warning. It was in that same Church of Ephesus, as we find from the Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy, that certain persons *erred concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection was past already,* and so *overthrew the faith of some.* To deny the Resurrection was to open the door to all licentiousness. If this body is simply to drop off or be laid aside for ever in death, what matters it how we use it in this life? It can scarcely surprise us, after this intimation, to find in the Epistles of St. John, whose later ministry was exercised at Ephesus, the mention of *false prophets,* who *confessed not that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh*—set aside, that is, the true Incarnation, and with it the real humanity, of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to whom he applies the solemn words of excommunication, *Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds.* Or to read, finally, in the

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Revelation of St. John, of certain persons called *Nicolaitanes*—probably promulgators of an openly Antinomian and immoral doctrine, whom it is a mark of grace in the Ephesian Congregations to refuse and even to abhor.

Beware of false prophets. They may do you great mischief. Much depends upon true teaching. The Church of God is more dependent than we are always willing to admit upon its pastors and teachers for its stability and its life.

We have referred to the records of Apostolical times. Let us take one example from our own.

There are some professed Christians who assign what we cannot but call (speaking from Scripture) a false and fallacious importance to some particular signs of Conversion. A system of mere excitement is tried upon a dying man, in the hope of drawing from him some expression indicative of sudden assurance. If he can be brought to say that he feels peace, that he is sure he is forgiven, that he has seen the Saviour; even less than this, that he has seen a company of Angels beckoning to him, or heard sweet music, or seen a bright light shining in the chamber; these persons not only draw from these signs a

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faint peradventure of mercy, but they even speak of it as a triumphant deathbed, as an undoubted evidence of a transition in one moment from a life of sin to a life of glory. Such teaching has done and is doing infinite harm among our poor and ignorant people. It encourages a putting off of the work of repentance, and a loose lying trust in tokens which have no pretence of confirmation from the Gospel, which counterworks all strivings of the conscience, and all admonitions of the pure and sound Word of God.

These are examples of our Lord's meaning when He said, *Beware of false prophets*, coming to you under the mark of kindness, but in reality coming rather to destroy than to save.

Now He bids the Church to try the teacher by his *fruits. By their fruits ye shall know them.* As surely as the thorn does not bear grapes, nor the thistle figs; as surely as every good tree brings forth good fruit, and every corrupt tree evil fruit; so surely may the dangerous false prophet be discerned by observing his fruits. *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

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In the long run, on a large view, and to a sober judgment, a false teaching will betray itself by an evil life. A really good man will be taught of God to avoid grave error. Or if this cannot in every case—perhaps it cannot—be said with literal truth; for certainly some men of unsound opinions have been men of blameless life; yet at least the converse holds good: that a bad man cannot be a safe teacher; that a man of evil life must be a false prophet, even though his words be true. There can be no persuasion on his lips — certainly there can be no unction from on high upon his ministry—who in works is contradicting that which in words he is professing.

Solemn truths are these for all who teach: anxious, discriminating lessons, which may God give us grace to lay well to heart!

2. But the second caution has immediate reference to all alike.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

The first seducing influence was that of false doctrine from another: the second seducing in-

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fluence is that of an inconsistent life of your own.

And to this topic, this all-important topic, our Lord devotes the remaining words of His Discourse. In which, however, we may still see three minor subdivisions.

(1) *There is exclusion for him who professes without doing.*

To say to Christ, *Lord, Lord;* in other words, to call Him our Master, to address Him in Prayer, to confess Him in Creeds and Hymns as our Lord—as the Person, the living Person, who has a right to our service, and to whom we belong as His creatures and His redeemed; this is one thing.

It is meet and right so to do. Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. That is His relation to us; that is our relation to Him: our Lord He is—His servants are we.

But if this, by our own confession, is true, how instant the conclusion, as it is drawn by the Prophet Malachi, *If I be a Master, where is my fear?* To what purpose call ye me *Lord, Lord,* and do not the things which I say? If you would enter in at last through the strait gate which leads into life, you must have borne

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here, in the sight of Christ, this character, that you have done the will of Him whom you are to find and to dwell with in heaven.

No words of man could add either clearness to the argument, or strength to the appeal.

If we would only say to ourselves each morning, Christ is my Master—what is my work for Him to-day? if we would only at evening force ourselves to carry in to Him our day's report, saying, *This have I left undone, which Thou didst command me; and this have I done, which Thou didst forbid;* thus giving reality to the mastership, and meaning to the service; all might yet be well. We could not go on for ever indolent, trifling, purposeless, self-conceited: the question would be brought to issue, and he who had been all his life idly calling Christ his Lord would begin at last to mean by it that he felt himself to be Christ's servant.

(2) *There may be a zeal for Christ, and a power for Christ, which is yet worthless because it was not accompanied by obedience.*

Christ says that this is even a common thing. *Many will say to me in that day*—there is no need to explain what day—the day to which all eyes are

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turned, in heaven and on earth, consciously or unconsciously, in hope or in fear, in anxiety or in carelessness—*the day—the great day*—the day of clearing up, and of reckoning, and of restitution, and of rectification, and of retribution—*Many will say to me in that day*—in the tone of surprise, and of disappointment, and almost of resentment as for a wrong done and a false expectation encouraged—*Lord, Lord, did we not* during our earthly day *prophesy in Thy name? and in Thy name cast out devils? and in Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*

Thus it is not only an empty profession of Christianity which will then be put to shame and cast out. The thing may have gone much beyond this. There may even have been a use of the name of Christ in Christ's behalf; there may have been a prophesying, and a casting out of devils, and a doing of wonderful works, on the strength of faith in Him; and yet, all the time, a working of iniquity, and therefore, in the end, a disclaimer by Him whom truly to know is eternal life.

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The words are true words, for Christ spake them. And yet they are as mysterious as they are alarming. This power to effect great things for Christ, ought it not to have been a clear proof of being Christ's? A man who in Christ's name could cast out an evil spirit, must he not first have known Christ, and been in communication with Christ, and even had the Spirit of Christ?

Yet Christ Himself seems to say that there may be a communication with Him, and a going forth of virtue from Him, and a transmission of that virtue for the healing of another in His name—and yet no saving knowledge, no spiritual grace, no Divine approval, and no eventual blessing. It is just as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels—and though I have the gift of prophecy—and though I have all faith—and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned*—yet, if I have not the graces as well as the gifts of the Spirit; if I have not that chief and crown of graces, which is Christian love; *I am nothing —it profiteth me nothing.*

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It is natural to man to worship power. We estimate everything by power. If a man can speak well upon Christian mysteries; if a man can persuade others mightily out of the Scriptures; if a man has great influence with the young, or great authority with the dying; we conclude at once that that man is in, and one of the greatest in, the kingdom of God. And some men go on to make him an idol: and others envy him: and others reproach themselves as destitute of grace, because they have no spark of these powers. But read here, in these few words of our Master, the true place and the just estimate of all these endowments. It is possible that to a man who has had all these Christ may say in the judgment, *I never knew thee.* Thou hadst the gift, but thou hadst not the grace, of my Spirit. Thou wast enlightened to understand the Scriptures, and to *taste* (as an Apostle writes) *the powers of the world to come:* in the strength of this enlightenment thou didst work for me, and speak for me, and do great acts, and even cast out devils: but amidst all this I never really knew thee; never talked with thee *as a man talketh with his friend;* never told

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thee my secrets, nor heard from thee thine; never communed with thee, at morning and evening, for thy humbling, and for thy comforting, and for thy strengthening: and why? why this mutual unacquaintance? Because I loved thee not? because I died not for thee? because I had excluded thee from my salvation, desired thy death, cast out thy prayers? because I took thy service without wages, and would not reward with my blessing thy honest toil? Nay, but for this other, this most different reason: because, though thou wouldest work for me, thou wouldest not watch with me, wouldest not mortify inclination, wouldest not deny self, wouldest not crucify sin for me: because thou wouldest compound for sin by service, and blind mine eyes to thy lusts by stretching out a *right hand* that was *full of gifts*. Therefore in vain didst thou worship: in vain didst thou prophesy, preach, and praise!

Let us hear and fear. Let any of us who may have been tempted to be vain, either of a professional standing, or a successful ministry, or a powerful influence, used well and wisely for the good of others, look well to it that there be not within, all the time, a worldly spirit, a self-exalting

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ambition, a creeping self-complacency, or even worse things yet — even some bosom sin uneradicated through grace, or some obstinate temper as yet unhumbled at the foot of the Cross!

(3) *The great day shall try and test the real ground of hope.*

The Sermon ends with this last similitude.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a (the) rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods (rivers, or streams) came, and the winds blew, and beat (fell) upon that house; and it fell not: for it was (had been) founded upon a (the) rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

The house is the sinner's hope. It is not difficult to run up a building which shall have the semblance of a secure dwelling. The walls may be straight and sound; the windows, doors

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and roof substantial and weather-tight: on a day bright with sunshine the occupant enters, and for half a season he may rejoice in the solidity and comfort of his dwelling. At last a storm comes. The heavy rain beats against his window-panes: the streams swell and rise, till they overflow their banks, and pour their full tide upon his foundations: *there comes* at last (as in the Patriarch's history) *a great wind from the wilderness, and smites the four corners of the house:* then is the day of trial: the storm tests the work which looked well and stood well through the sunshine: now shall it be seen whether the building *had foundations:* whether it was founded upon a rock which cannot be moved, or upon the loose shifting sand which a breath can scatter.

Even thus is it with the thing signified.

A man hears of Christ. The Gospel is preached to him. He hears of a propitiation for sin. He hears of One who *came into the world to save sinners*, and whose *blood cleanseth us from all sin.* He is conscious enough of guilt and defilement to rejoice in the sound. He determines to place his personal hope there; in the one Atonement made once for all upon the cross for

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all sin. It is well. He takes to himself all the comforts and all the hopes of the Gospel. He even fights for the purity and for the completeness of this salvation. He judges his teachers, he judges of his friends, by the singleness of their trust in Christ, by the entireness of their dependence upon a work wrought for them. And this too is well. This too, if he knows his own meaning, this too is the Gospel.

But the man stops there. His little circle of doctrine is soon traversed: his formula of faith is soon told. And in his view, to go on to work upon this, and to work from this, is a needless and a perilous toil; more likely to interfere with than to do honour to the simplicity of his trust in Christ. It is easier far, and far more consistent with the theory of his position, to repeat over and over the confession of a self-renouncing faith, than to set himself earnestly to *show his faith by his works*, and to devote himself actively to His service who died for him and rose again.

That is one of the two cases.

Another has been deeply convinced of sin. He has had experience of himself. He knows

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something of the power of temptation, and much of his own instability and infirmity. He too has heard of Christ, and rejoiced in the Gospel. There he finds that which meets his case: his case in both its parts; in its guilt, and in its sin; in its past transgressions, and in its present and prospective weakness. He builds upon the rock which is Christ Jesus; not in one of His offices, but in both and in all. Trusting in Him for pardon, he trusts in Him also for cleansing. He understands in a twofold completeness the gracious words which the other takes but in half their significance, *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.* He sees there not the blood alone, but the blood and the water; the atonement made, and the holiness offered. Upon that unassailable rock he builds for time, and he builds for eternity. Day by day he brings to Jesus Christ his sins to be forgiven, and his infirmities to be strengthened. Day by day he hears from Him the reassuring, the life-giving sound, *My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness.* In that strength he both trusts and works; receives pardon, and receives grace also. Like the wise man in the

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Parable, he builds his house upon the rock, and waits in quiet confidence the coming of that day which *shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

The day, the great day—who shall abide its coming? Who, in this distance, shall dare to speak of it—unless it be just in Christ's words—just to echo the revelation made of the judgment by the Judge?

But this at least we can perceive; that nothing can live through that day, which is not real and solid and true.

The very standing face to face with Christ—the beholding that eye which reads the heart—the hearing that voice which is to pronounce according to truth — this is enough. This will make the hypocrite for once sincere, and the dishonest man true.

When the King came in to see the guests, He saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. Do you suppose that that man had had no excuse ready? that he could not have framed, one moment before, a thousand good reasons for his destitution? But no sooner did the King come in, fix his eye upon him, and ask him why

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he was as he was—how he came in there thus—than all left him, all was forgotten: *he was speechless.*

This is that descending of the rain, that coming of the floods, that blowing and beating of the wind, of which Christ speaks. It is nothing more than the appearing of Christ the Judge. It is that sudden exchange of truth for falsehood, which is the instant consequence of His coming who is the Truth. Then, under that eye, in that presence, the house of lies falls at once; and the house of truth, the house of honesty, the house of consistency and of obedience, stands, and shall stand.

It fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And that rock was Christ: Christ in His twofold office; Christ the Righteousness, and also Christ the Sanctification.

It fell, and great was the fall of it. Great in proportion to its height, in proportion to its proud front and arrogant pretension: great the fall, because great the building.

We have now once again read Christ's words. We cannot say that we do not know His will.

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We cannot say that we were not warned. We have been reminded, yet once more, what it is for which Christ looks in us; that we not only hear what He says, but also do it. That we bring our lives—our actions, words, and thoughts—our daily habits, our common language, our prevailing tone of feeling and judgment—into conformity with His rule and with His example. If we do not this, in vain shall we have cherished comforting hopes, or done battle for the exact faith once delivered to the saints.

And do we, in thus speaking, forget our own frailty? Do we seem to set aside the remembrance of what we are—how fallen, how weak, how inconstant, how unstable? Not so. It is because we are all this, and more than all this as fallen and lost sinners, that we have need to come to Christ, and to stay with Christ, as all that He is: not satisfied with one purification in the laver of a free forgiveness, but desiring day by day to *wash our feet* also from the defilements of a miry road and a sin-soiled earth.

Because we are sinners, therefore will we come to Christ for pardon. Because we are sinners, therefore will we stay with Christ for cleansing.

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So coming and coming again—so tarrying and abiding with Him—it will be no shock to us, and no terror, when we see Him come to us; when the well-known voice pierces even the ear of death, and bids us come forth to Resurrection and Judgment. *Surely*, shall we say, *it is the Lord: I waited for Him in life, he has come for me in death: I will arise, and go: He shall undertake for me: He shall plead my cause with God: for the Judge is the Saviour, and the form of the King is the form of the Son of Man.*

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